

Louise Mabile

Nietzsche and the Anglo-Saxon Tradition



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Nietzsche and the Anglo-Saxon Tradition

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I dedicate this to Marinus Schoeman. Not everyone is as fortunate as to be guided into philosophy by such an unusual intellect.

And to my mother, Cordie Mabile, who first taught me to love Shakespeare the way I do.

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	viii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	ix
Introduction: The English Type	1
1 Englishmen Underground; or the Case of the Abdicated Playwright	16
2 Hobbes against the World	35
3 Locke, Life, Language	50
4 Hume on the Use and Abuse of Scepticism for Life	72
5 'Some Have Suspected Me of Darwinism'	95
6 The Impossible John Stuart Mill	106
7 How Monsieur George Eliot Added Insult to Injury	128
8 Wrong but Romantic	140
9 Shakespeare, Sterne and Stage	152
10 The Great American Who Loved the World	170
<i>Bibliography</i>	194
<i>Index</i>	199

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Abbreviations

A	<i>The Antichrist</i>
BGE	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
BP	<i>The Book of the Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Philosophy</i>
BT	<i>The Birth of Tragedy</i>
CW	<i>The Case of Wagner</i>
D	<i>Daybreak</i>
EH	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
HC	<i>Homer's Contest</i>
GM	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
GS	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HAH	<i>Human, All Too Human</i>
KGW	<i>Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i>
KSA	<i>Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe</i>
NL	<i>Nachgelassen Fragmente</i>
OTL	<i>On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense</i>
PHTG	<i>Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks</i>
SE	<i>Schopenhauer as Educator</i>
TI	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
UM	<i>Untimely Meditation</i>
WP	<i>The Will to Power</i>
WS	<i>The Wanderer and His Shadow</i>
Z	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

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Introduction: The English Type

It would at first appear that the kindest thing one can say about Nietzsche's attitude towards the English is that at least he hated the Germans even more. Much of what he has to say about the British philosophical tradition reaches the pitch of denunciation and personal insult. He calls Darwin 'stupid' (*Will to Power* (WP) 130) and refers to John Stuart Mill as 'that flat-head' (WP 30), and dismisses the humanist ethics of George Eliot as the leftover Christian ramblings of a 'little woman' (*Twilight of the Idols* (TI), 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', 5). The vehemence of attacks like these, and the fact that Nietzsche's philosophical project undermines tenets at the heart of British philosophy, like democracy and the basic equality of all human beings, the ability to achieve social progress through the application of reason and a *laissez-faire* economy, have for a long time contributed to Nietzsche being viewed with suspicion in England and also in the United States. In England he was seen as one of the most dangerous enemies of the 'open society' (Karl Popper's phrase) and in the United States as the herald of moral relativism (by, for example, Alan Bloom). The shadow of Nazi associations of course hardly helped matters.

But in the years following Walter Kaufman's 'rehabilitation', Nietzsche's reputation would undergo an unprecedented transformation, a transformation so radical that Nietzsche is today seen as one of the greatest defenders of human freedom in the history of philosophy. His is more than just a model for political liberty; it is a grand vision of what humanity could be if it really unleashed its creative powers. For closet elitists and the many who despair of the decadence and vulgarity of a world where the free market has become the ultimate arbiter of all human values, he is no mere philosopher. He has become a virtual sanctuary for those who can no longer bear the shallowness that is the inevitable result of liberal ideals. Whoever thinks otherwise, and yet does not want to go as far as to 'go voluntarily into a madhouse' (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Z), Prologue 5) has one advantage that Nietzsche himself never had: they have the Nietzschean *oeuvre* to console them. And Nietzsche owes more than just a passing debt to the Anglo-Saxon world in the construction of this vision. However, while

he gladly acknowledges the French roots of his thought, writing in the draft of a letter to Jean Bourdeau that 'it is high time that I come again to the world as a Frenchman' (the French appeared to have taken him at his word; he has today become a veritable institution in French philosophy departments) and while his use of his own tradition, both literary and philosophical, has been carefully studied and analysed, very little has been said about the English giants whose influence abounds in his work. Shakespeare, for example, is mentioned over a hundred times in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*, and makes his first appearance before even Goethe does. Nietzsche even goes so far as to call Wagnerian drama 'bad Shakespeare' (Aphorism 2369, *Nachlass* 85–86, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Studienausgabe* (KSA) 8.196). Some work has obviously been done on Nietzsche and Darwin, and on Emerson, the one American that Nietzsche truly admired, but we look in vain for even an article on Laurence Sterne, Jonathan Swift, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Carlyle or George Eliot and what they meant to Nietzsche. Very little too has been said on Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Mill or Hume: they usually only merit a passing comment in an article on Nietzsche's politics or conception of science. And the *Nietzsche-Studien* boasts but a single cursory article on Nietzsche and his relationship with Byron and Shelley. Given the enormous interest in every possible aspect of Nietzsche – he is the one member of the original triumvirate of suspicion (the others being Marx and Freud) in whom interest shows no sign of waning – it is hard to account for this lack of serious scholarly consideration of his engagement with the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition. This world was as important to Nietzsche as were the French and German traditions, particularly if one takes into account that no other country embodied the vices of modernity against which Nietzsche railed quite to the extent that imperial Britain did. And no other country had so much at its disposal to aid them into making their values the world's. The grand narrative of British philosophy, with its persistent theme of 'progress' is a case of undiluted modernism. This book examines Nietzsche's engagement with this tradition, what he loved and loathed about it, and how it helped to form the philosopher that we today know as 'Nietzsche'. As I show in Chapter 8, with the aid of Laurence Sterne and the world's most famous playwright, the question of the proper name is no simple matter.

And neither is the question of metaphysics. Once they become a 'tradition', it is almost impossible to break old epistemological habits. For all its insistence upon the value of 'common sense', faith in empiricism and dismissal of unnecessary metaphysical constructions (metaphysics is, after all, as Lord Bowen reminds us, but the 'search in a dark room for a black hat

which is not there'), there is a strong other- and anti-worldly element in the English obsession with 'discovering' and then 'improving' the world. From a Nietzschean perspective, the English are the Jews of modernity.

There is a reason for making a statement which may at first read like Nietzsche at his worst. It is necessary to remind the nervous reader that Nietzsche dealt in *types*, not groups that are geographically or racially determined. Moreover, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, the hammer of the metaphysicians had nothing but the most virulent contempt for those who uncritically assume ready-made and final identities.

The same goes for those who relinquish their responsibility to be *good readers*. Nietzsche has of course transformed hermeneutics, and as the unofficial 'grandfather' of deconstruction, has often been blamed for opacity and obscurity. What appears at first sight to be shocking or self-contradictory, however, simply means that the reader has to work harder and read further. Part of Nietzsche's strategy in invigorating modern culture is the liberation of the text from authorial intention and turning it into a playing field for new creation in its own right. Once a text has been written, it begins to live a life of its own. In Nietzsche's own words: 'The book becomes almost human' (*Human, All Too Human* (HAH) 208). As such, it is not to be trusted summarily, and this is particularly true of texts like 'Of Peoples and Fatherlands' in *Beyond Good and Evil* (BGE) section 5. Nietzsche often uses national stereotyping in order to describe cultural or intellectual qualities. Germans, for example, tend to be described as romantic, unscientific and prone to fanaticism and pessimism, while 'Chinese' denotes cultural stasis and the Polish are seen as 'intellectual'. Being 'French' is of course something to which the self-respecting intellectual should aspire. These cultural stereotypes are precisely that: *types* created by Nietzsche in order to intensify his qualitative distinctions. 'Type' can be defined as a distinct psychological kind, class or order, characterized by specific character traits and determined by specific differences in modes of evaluation, judgement or behaviour. The word is derived from the Greek *týpos*, which roughly translates to 'character', 'impression' or 'exemplar'. 'Types' in the Nietzschean sense rather resembles the Reverend Sydney Smith's object of aversion when he famously admitted to Lady Holland that 'I rather dislike old wives (of both sexes)'. It is clear that 'old wives' are by no means identical to 'old women' or to women as such for that matter. 'Old wives' here denotes an *attitude*, not a gender or age, in particular the attitude of clinging unnecessarily to superstition or outdated fears. Nietzsche's types can thus be described as aesthetic aids, rather than racial classifications.

In *On the Genealogy of Morals* (GM), Nietzsche describes the mode of genealogy hitherto practised as ‘an upside down and perverse species of genealogical hypothesis, the genuinely *English* type, that attracted me’ (GM I, i). The only explicit practitioner of this mode of genealogy, however, is his friend, Paul Reé, a German Jew! The English type thus manifests itself well beyond the borders of England. What sets this type apart from all others, besides its insistence upon a rather naïve faith in simple and objective scientific truth, is its attitude towards the place and value of conflict. Because of the devastation so often caused by political conflict, modern liberal philosophy is marked by a distinct hostility towards any suggestion of the creative or inspiring dimension of conflict, making the resolution of conflict in favour of consensus and security its explicit aim. This is particularly true of the English tradition. From Francis Bacon’s scientific commonwealth to Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and the nineteenth-century socialist ideals, English philosophy has a definite utopian dimension: it is no accident that Thomas More, who coined the term, was an Englishman. All utopian ideals have one thing in common, namely the hope for a *better world to come*. Whether it be couched in worldly or other-worldly terms, utopian dreams are a symptom of some kind of dissatisfaction with the present. It is always a great risk to generalize to the extent that Nietzsche often does, but as the narrator in a well-known cult novel¹ says, even in the crudest generalization there is a tiny splinter of truth. Besides, as every Nietzsche enthusiast knows, the very notion of the concept itself is nothing but the product of a long process of generalization. If one were to generalize about English philosophy in a Nietzschean fashion, it would be tempting to describe it as a grand effort to *escape* the world, via recipes ranging from utilitarian golden rules to meliorism. With apology to Whitehead, one could argue that his tradition consists not simply of footnotes to Plato, but of a series of escape clauses aimed at establishing first and final principles, rather than ongoing conversations. If the world is no longer to be redeemed by God, then it should be by other means: at least by science or the free market. There is no need to be either Platonic or Christian in order to exhibit a strongly anti-worldly ethos: sometimes the best escape mechanism is to escape into the tangible, material world. There is no better place to hide than a prison.

All that is required is a deeply felt sense of *ressentiment*, a desire to make the world into something *other* than what it is, that is, into something regulated, ordered, and above all, *safe*. Politics, in the English world, is an instrument for establishing social order, and there thinkers are primarily concerned with matters like the protection of life (Thomas

Hobbes), and property (Locke), or the promotion of general social welfare (Mill *père et fils* and Jeremy Bentham). These thinkers are alchemists acting contrary to their calling, thinkers who turn men into sand. In *Daybreak* (D) 174, Nietzsche writes the following on modern ideals: 'Are we not, with this tremendous objective of obliterating all the sharp edges of life, well on the way to turning mankind into *sand*? Sand! Small, soft, round, unending sand! Is that your ideal, you heralds of sympathetic affections?'

The English tradition has always assumed – despite all the evidence to the contrary – that the world was ultimately made for man, and that it was merely a question of clearing the *debris* of falsehood before the *real* world, the world in which we were meant to live, would make its appearance. Locke's seminal *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* indeed begins by stating explicitly that the task of the philosopher is to clear the ground and remove 'some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge' (Epistle to the Reader). This ideal of plain and simple truth is hard to exorcise. This is a soteriological ideal. Soteriology – from the Greek *soter* meaning 'salvation' – can take many forms, but be it religious, psychoanalytical, philosophical or economical, such narratives usually begin with a grand claim that humanity (or in some cases, only part of it, as the obvious case of Marxism suggests) has become estranged or alienated from something of fundamental importance, and then proceed to describe the remedy by which this estrangement is to be overcome. The soteriological model is at least as old as Plato, but it is still going strongly in even the most familiar of contemporary ideals, such as the 'Make Poverty History' campaign, or Richard Dawkins's attempt to strip the world of its religious delusions. The ideal reached its apotheosis in the nineteenth century, with the hope for the discovery of a secret, stable and solid element that would put the lives of men and women, living lives exposed to the foibles of fate and contingency, into perspective. The soteriological ideal is the political symptom of what Nietzsche regards as a 'hangman's metaphysics'. Metaphysicians tend to resemble the religious faithful in that they both, finding the human condition unbearable, assert the primacy of a better world beyond this one. For the religious believer, this is expressed chronologically, it is quite literally the hereafter. For the metaphysician, this is expressed through static concepts, the ultimate one the enduring presence (*ousia*) of Being. The desire for full presence takes many forms. Lord Bowen, for example, did not escape metaphysics; he simply exchanged an idealistic metaphysics for a materialistic one. This is a common expression of the desire for Being, and, as we shall see, a particularly English one. To loudly proclaim that only

matter exists, has not only not solved a single philosophical conundrum, it is also an example of the need for a philosophical security blanket.

Metaphysics is still needed by some; but so is the impetuous *demand for certainty* that today discharges itself among large numbers of people in a scientific-positivistic form. The demand that one *wants* by all means that something should be firm – this too, is a demand for support, a prop, in short, that *instinct of weakness* which, to be sure, does not create religious, metaphysical systems and convictions of all kinds but – conserves them. (*The Gay Science* (GS) 347)

Nietzsche also provides us with the reason why conservation has proven to be the most successful philosophical strategy hitherto observed: ‘The doctrine of Being, of thing, of all sorts of fixed unities is a hundred times easier than the doctrine of development, of becoming’ (WP538). The myth of Being is a response to the desire for property. In order to possess knowledge, man needs fixed, static, unchanging objects for study. Philosophy, as well as religion, Nietzsche assures us, is a result of our ‘longing for property’ (*Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (PHTG) 60).² Because the world of change, chance and becoming does not lend itself to possession by the subject of knowledge, he creates another world, a world of pure forms, and absolute Good, or a perfect God.

It is this quality that makes the English ‘Jewish’ in the Nietzschean framework. ‘Jewishness’ is Nietzschean code for the archmetaphysical tendency to think of truth as something given, permanent and transcendental, as something to be discovered or recovered rather than created. Central to this doctrine is the expression of moral values in convenient classes of good and evil. According to Nietzsche, the history of morality itself reveals itself to be the battle between two opposing sets of values, namely the classical distinction between ‘good and bad’, against the ‘Jewish’ – which would later become ‘Christian’, and for our current purposes, perfected by the ‘English’ – good and evil. Nietzsche writes:

The symbol of this fight, written in a script which has hitherto remained legible throughout human history, is ‘Rome against Judea. Judea against Rome’: – Up to now there has been no greater event than *this* battle, *this* contradiction of mortal enemies. Rome saw the Jew as contrary to nature, as though he were its polar opposite, a monster; in Rome, the Jew was looked upon as *convicted* of hatred against the whole of mankind, rightly, if one is right in linking the well-being and future of the human race with the unconditional rule of aristocratic values, Roman values.

[. . .]

The Jews were a priestly race of *ressentiment par excellence*, possessing an unparalleled talent for popular morality. Which of them has prevailed for the time being, Rome or Judea? But there is no trace of doubt: just consider who you bow down to in Rome itself, today, as though to the embodiment of the highest values – and not just in Rome, but over nearly half the earth, everywhere where man has become tame. (GMI, 16)

This morality received a powerful injection, and although Luther is the first one that comes to mind when the Reformation is mentioned, England played her role too:

However, in the Renaissance, there was a brilliant, uncanny re-awakening of the classical ideal, of the noble method of valuing everything: Rome itself woke up, as though from suspended animation, under the pressure of the new, Judaic Rome built over it, which looked like a ecumenical synagogue and was called ‘Church’: but Judea triumphed again at once, thanks to that basic proletarian (German and English) *ressentiment*-movement which people called the Reformation. (GMI, 16)

In the ‘noble’ (i.e. classical) tradition, the ‘good’ is not given. Often, it is not even ‘good’ in the sense that it is commonly understood, that is, in the transcendental, Christian sense but a quality that reveals itself as the result of wise judgement in particular circumstances. As I demonstrate in my discussion on George Eliot’s morality, it can be argued that Christianity has never been as successful as when it has been secularized. Nietzsche makes it plain that the proud scientific atheists of his day should not pride themselves on defeating the Church, they have become the institution they despised: puritanical, judgemental and very unartistic. In the case of Eliot, very unfeminine too.

Nietzsche’s championing of art should by no means be read as a romantic alternative to scientific modernism. For Nietzsche, science is also artful: scientific truth is an artificialization of existence. Art and science both function to form and reduce the *arbitrariness* of life, adding permanence and measure to what would otherwise be the measureless expanse of Nature. In *The Use and Abuse of History for Life*, Nietzsche describes creative forming power as a *plastische Kraft*, a synthetic power that makes diversity manageable and lends meaning to multifariousness. This conception of creativity emerges out of his confrontation with antiquity in *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT). Although it undergoes a number of metamorphoses and often appears under different names and guises, right throughout Nietzsche’s work, there is a conflict between two

central principles. These are described first in *BT* as the Apollonian principle of order, image, dreams and theory, and the Dionysian principle of chaos, passion and sensuous inspiration. The conflict between these principles takes several forms, an important one being the distinction between the decadent, anti-instinctual Socrates, whose life-denying rationality spells the end for tragic culture – and made Athens ‘Jewish’ – and the healthy Heraclitian ‘aesthetic fundamental perception’ (*aesthetische Grundperception*) with its play in the world. Nietzsche describes Heraclitus watching some noisy children at play and ‘pondering something never before pondered by a mortal on such occasion, namely the play of the great world-child Zeus, and the eternal game of world-destruction and origination’ (*Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGW) III, 2). Heraclitus comes to the divine, artistic conclusion that ‘everything is illusion and play’. For Nietzsche, *this* was the great moment of truth in Western history, when sage and artist acknowledged there is no truth, or there is at least so much truth that it will forever be beyond the grasp of even the most accomplished subject. As nauseating as this thought is to the remaining logical positivists, it has become part of the late modern intellectual landscape, and is unlikely to make a departure soon. ‘There is no truth, there are only different *styles* of making sense of the world: metaphysics, religion, morality, science – all of them are only products of the will to art, to lie, to flight from truth, to the *negation* of truth’ (WP853: 1).

And where there is style, there is struggle and conflict. In the Nietzschean framework, struggle or tension are no mere problems to be avoided, they are an essential *condition* of and for life: everything that is beautiful or valuable – in fact, everything that exists – owes that existence to conditions of conflict or hardship of some kind. Likewise, the very ability to recognize its value depends upon it: what we call ‘evaluation’ or ‘judgement’ is the result of a fierce sensual and psychological struggle of which we only experience the result. Philosophy had hitherto taken the tip of the iceberg for the iceberg itself: no creative or evaluative urge is simply positive or negative. Nor is it even self-identical. In GS 370, for example, Nietzsche distinguishes between creative drives that either flow from a desire for being (i.e. to immortalize), and the desire for destruction, for change, for the future. Either one can serve life:

The desire for destruction, change and becoming can be an expression of an overflowing energy that is pregnant with the future; but it can also be the hatred of the ill-constituted, disinherited and underprivileged, who destroy, *must* destroy, indeed all existence, all being, outrages and provokes them. (GS 370)

Its opposite, the will to stasis and immortality is equally ambiguous: 'It can be prompted by gratitude and love, art with this origin will always be an art of apotheoses, perhaps dithyrambic like Rubens or blissfully mocking like Hafiz, gracious like Goethe spreading a Homeric light and glory over all things' (GS 370).

What is of cardinal importance is that no drive should dominate *completely*. In *Homer's Contest* (HC), Nietzsche's longest explicit treatment of the topic, Nietzsche comments that the aim of that curious ancient practice of ostracism was not to act as a safety-valve, but as a *stimulant*:

The all-excelling individual was to be removed in order that the competition of forces might re-awaken, a thought which is hostile to the 'exclusiveness' of genius in the modern sense but which assumes that in the natural order of things there are always several geniuses which incite one another to action, as much also as they hold one another within the bounds of moderation. That is the kernel of the Hellenic competition-conception: it abominates autocracy, and fears its dangers; it desires as a preventive against the genius – a *second* genius. (HC)

In the late nineteenth century, thoroughly determined by Hegelian notions of progress and its even more powerful British counterpart in the form of blunt metanarratives of bread, knowledge and freedom, as identified by that perceptive Lyotard of the nineteenth century, William Lovett, it was far more important to be proven *right* than to engage in struggle to show off your talents. This was a serious world, with no room for play, reassessment or mistakes. In Nietzschean terms, it was a question of empire before civilization; the essence of decadence. This is why, for Europe's sake, it was a matter of utmost importance that the *agon* had to be rehabilitated: without a developed appreciation for the value of struggle, other enabling and subversive activities like genealogy would be impossible. For what is genealogy but a dive into the bottomless history of conflict? Nietzsche wanted to be a great stimulus not only to philosophy, but to European civilization itself. He was, like Socrates, a gadfly in his own right, one who had his stinger ready for 'scholarly oxen' of all kinds, including those who simply pushed him into the service of 'progress' and mistook him for a Darwinist. The Nietzschean style itself is a protest against all metanarratives, his texts *refuse* categorization. In a letter to Erwin Rhode, Nietzsche makes it clear that his *Untimely Meditations* (UMs) represents his own attempt to revive the *agon*, they are *agonale Betrachtungen*, texts that do battle with icons like David Strauss and Richard Wagner.

The Nietzschean *agon* is no mindless Hobbesian battle of all against all, but a Greek-inspired notion of productive conflict in which opponents contest one another through a mutual process of empowerment and restraint. Nietzsche distinguishes, again, between two different *types* or possibilities of struggle. The one, whose story is told in *GM*, is the reactive revolt of the slaves or weak class against the strong or 'master-class'. Their struggle is the product of passive, mean-spirited hatred, and aims at the total annihilation of the hated Other. Afraid of the very real power of that Other, a power rooted in the reigning political order, the slaves take a subtle revenge on the masters by reversing the Other's values: noble strength is now no longer what it used to be. From now on, the meek shall inherit the earth.

There is also, however, the complex, reciprocal interplay between a number of equal and eager contestants. In this case, there is no attempt to exorcize the notion of struggle; instead, it is sublimated and turned into something noble and admirable. Powerful, destructive drives now become the constructive elements in building a great culture: according to Nietzsche, Greek culture cannot be imagined without this central characteristic. Rather than to try and deny their violent urges, the Greeks allowed for their discharge in domains where they were kept in check by aesthetic rules. In the *agora*, on the sportsfield, stage and even battlefield, the prevailing value was *mastery*, not annihilation. Greek games, in their various manifestations, were aimed at temporary and inclusive victory that allowed for the contest to resume at a later stage. The show must go on. This also implies a difference in attitude to opponents. In the Jewish world, the Enemy – worldly as well as metaphysical – is absolute evil incarnate, and must be conquered, destroyed or transformed. In the Greek world, it is more appropriate to speak of an adversary, often an appreciated and respected warrior who simply happens to be fighting for the other side. This is why Achilles' mistreatment of Hector's body in the *Iliad* is such a heinous crime: there are rules to which every warrior must adhere to be counted *as a warrior*. By transgressing these rules, he steps outside the field of honourable contest and becomes a cowardly butcher.

Nietzsche takes a leaf from the Greek book: even when battling with dead men, Nietzsche respects the classical notion of the limit. As fierce as his words are, there is the underlying compliment that he deemed them worthy of his attention, and in his criticisms of his opponents' weaknesses he also draws out their strengths. There are many that are today simply remembered for being loathed by Nietzsche. The *agon* is the ultimate worldly game. This means that the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as its secular inheritors, will find it difficult to appreciate its true meaning. In

the Judeo-Christian world, values had to be *absolute*: the divine had to be the absolutely Good and pure Other to sinful humanity. If ever the twain shall meet, it is only through grace. Yahweh demanded total submission. The Greek gods, by contrast, often loved a rebellious human who could meet them on equal grounds. These gods embodied ideals to be emulated, the personification of beauty, courage or craftiness. As such, exceptional humans – like Odysseus, for example – had a chance at besting them. The gods were closer to a noble class than the divine antithesis to humanity.

What is un-Greek in Christianity. The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods above them as masters and themselves below them as servants, as did the Jews. They saw, as it were, only the reflection of the most successful specimens of their own caste, that is, an ideal, not a contrast to their own nature. They felt related to them, there was a reciprocal interest, a kind of *symmachia*. Man thinks of himself as noble when he gives himself such gods, and puts himself into a relationship similar to that of the lesser nobility to the higher. Whereas the Italic peoples have a regular peasant religion, with continual fearfulness about evil and capricious powers and tormentors. Where the Olympian gods retreated, there Greek life too grew gloomier and more fearful.

Christianity, on the other hand, crushed and shattered man completely, and submerged him as if in deep mire. Then, all at once, into his feeling of complete confusion, it allowed the light of divine compassion to shine, so that the surprised man, stunned by mercy, let out a cry of rapture, and thought for a moment that he carried all of heaven within him. All psychological inventions of Christianity work toward this sick excess of feeling, toward the deep corruption of head and heart necessary for it. Christianity wants to destroy, shatter, stun, intoxicate: there is only one thing it does not want: moderation, and for this reason, it is in its deepest meaning barbaric, Asiatic, ignoble, un-Greek. (*HAH* 92)

This opposition, which manifested itself in a world subject to flux and change, did not in itself last forever. Soon, the Greeks too, began to withdraw from the worldly *agon* themselves. Throughout his career, Nietzsche remained puzzled by the strange ‘un-Greek’ dimension to Plato. It is almost as if he cannot decide whether to blame Socrates (who corrupted the ‘divine’ Plato), or Plato, for transforming the healthy, robustly tragic world of pre-Socratic Athens into the milksop decadence of philosophical doctrine, doctrines that would grow from strength to strength as the world became modern, and reach their apotheosis in the time of the British Empire.

The difficulty the English tradition has with an agonal politics is highlighted by A. C. Grayling's populist account of the history of human rights in the recent *Towards the Light*.³ Grayling takes up Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction between positive and negative liberty. According to Berlin, negative liberty is the important one, and can simply be defined as the answer to the question 'What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons'. This is the 'classic' conception of liberty, originally formulated by John Stuart Mill, and addressed in Chapter 6. The liberal conception of liberty has severe limitations, as it fails to appreciate political freedom as something that is only truly present if it is actively acted out in the public arena. The key to genuine freedom, for Nietzsche, lies in man's capacity to evaluate, to set standards and to judge. Positive liberty is the exercising of this capacity: it is a noble, robust conception of freedom that does justice to man's greatest potential. It is by no means, as Grayling mistakenly asserts, to be associated with the state's capacity to prescribe or enforce ways of living and acting that are supposed to be in the citizen's best interests, such as 'not smoking, not driving a motor vehicle without a seat belt, and so on'.⁴ These mundane examples are merely cases of the state doing its bit to ensure safety, or freedom from danger – negative liberties that merely fall under another umbrella. This example of a well-known contemporary thinker shows the continuing unease of English liberalism with forgotten remainders and exclusions from the liberal system.

The notion of agonal conflict is, however, not as alien to the English world as Nietzsche suggests: William Blake makes it clear that there was no progress possible without conflict. Blake, however, was an outsider, as untimely as Nietzsche himself and by no means representative of English thought. But even though the English had no appreciation for the *agon*, it does not mean that they could not be roped in as worthy partners in a very interesting game. Nietzsche continues in *GMI*, i by stating that the English type attracted him with 'the power of attraction that everything contrary, everything antipodal, possesses'. It is precisely his difference with the British tradition that enables him to draw them, despite their sincerest efforts to think otherwise, back into a healthy *agon*. By doing this, Nietzsche also pays them a great compliment, for in an agonal framework one is judged as much by the quality of one's enemies as that of one's friends.

But Nietzsche, ever surprising his reader, is never merely a hater. Like Zarathustra, he is as much of a lover as a despiser, and the great lover of mankind loved many Englishmen, and an American, too. Men like Shakespeare, Sterne, Shelly and Emerson are also good Europeans. If bad Englishmen

are not limited to the British Isles, then neither are good Europeans to the Continent. In the book I have attempted to divide my Anglo-Saxons according to Zarathustra's three metamorphoses of the spirit, from the burdensome camels like Bacon, Hobbes and Locke, to the liberating laughing lions like David Hume, to those who were free enough not only to be willing to live in the world, but were also full and rich and able to create new ones. These are the great poets and ironists like the good Europeans mentioned above, or the playing children that succeed the laughing lions. Englishmen may not make good philosophers according to Nietzsche, but they are at their best when they *play*: as poets or on the stage. This is where the good European is usually to be found: on the stage, and this is where the English agonists were hiding all the time. Besides a prison, there is no better place to hide than the stage – see the chapter on Shakespeare and the mask – and the tragic stage is the best of all. For tragedy is the antithesis of soteriology: it is much more than the genre of 'sad stories of the death of kings'.⁵ Tragedy is what makes the heroic, and in the Nietzschean view, eventually the Superman, possible. This view does not see pain or injustice as something to be made obsolete by successful socio-economic planning, but as essential for personal and collective self-creation. Nietzsche insists – against Hobbes, against Locke, and against Mill – that far from being a defect, a flaw or disorder in the organization of society, there is something genuinely transformative about the chaos into which we are thrown in the experience of suffering. In failure, frustration and loss, we are not only faced with our vulnerability, our dependence on others and on our bodies, but also our strength and resilience and our remarkable capacity to reorganize anew. The English tragedians wrote tragedy despite themselves, not because of themselves (perhaps in order to escape Utopia?), but like the Greeks, they played a very significant role in allowing Nietzsche to develop an alternative viewpoint to the shallow optimism of the rest of the modernists. The playwright Eugene O'Neill proclaims that 'the tragedy of man is perhaps the only significant thing about him ... the individual life is made significant just by the struggle'.⁶ Even this, however, is still perhaps a little too moralistic for Nietzsche: man is not redeemed by his suffering, and tragedy is less a condition to be repaired than a condition to aspire to. If Kant urged his readers 'only to think!' then Nietzsche dares his readers only to be *tragic*. Suffering is a kind of crucible in which the unique human capacity for self-creation and legislation is revealed in all its splendour. Nietzsche's aesthetic exoneration of life is grounded in an algodicy that attempts to draw pain into the immanence of life that no longer requires redemption, but rather acceptance of the inherent 'lawfulness' of the world.

In the Nietzschean spirit of genealogy, Chapter 1 introduces the source of the English spirit of doing philosophy, Francis Bacon. The empirical-positivist has obviously moved on from the days of the simple inductive method, but the Baconian faith in objectivity is still going strong. The unwillingness to entertain the possibility of rifts and fissures and to have foundations at all costs had a profound impact on the development of the modern notion of truth. After the (re)birth of the scientific method – it was never truly gone – the question of truth became a perpetual crisis.

Chapter 2 continues the theme of science and truth, this time with a specific emphasis on the mechanistic world-view embodied by Thomas Hobbes. Although there are superficial resemblances between Hobbes and Nietzsche, it is with Hobbes's attitude towards conflict that Nietzsche truly departs from the mainstream philosophical tradition.

Chapter 3 deals with John Locke. Two major Nietzschean concerns appear in this chapter: language and life. It does not get any more Nietzschean than that.

Chapter 4 has David Hume as theme. Hume is the one English-speaking philosopher for whom Nietzsche had genuine respect, and the convergence in their respective lines of thought is truly remarkable and not limited to the obvious theme of causality either.

Chapter 5 deals with the unavoidable, namely Charles Darwin. Much has already been said about Darwin and Nietzsche, especially after the Second World War, and for a change I looked at Darwin and Nietzsche from a historical point of view, and show how much *more* Nietzsche was than a mere materialistic thinker.

Chapter 6 examines Nietzsche's relationship with John Stuart Mill. As may be expected at this stage, Nietzsche has nothing kind to say about Mill's logic and metaphysics, but since the criticism against the assumptions of the British Empiricist tradition has been dealt with in earlier chapters, we focus in this one on Nietzsche's comment on utilitarianism and utopian thinking. After all, not only does one repay one's teacher by remaining his student all your life, but one also does him a disservice as well by repeating the most salient features of his thinking *ad nauseum*.

No book on Nietzsche is ever complete without at least a brief mention of the feminine, and our Chapter 7 on George Eliot answers that demand. In this chapter, we look at important themes like truth and realism in art, gender, genealogy and the mask.

Chapter 8 then shifts towards the more 'positive' Englishmen, namely the Romantics, and what Nietzsche respectively took and rejected from the likes of Byron and Shelley.

All roads in English literature eventually pass Shakespeare, and not a few philosophical roads turned in his direction too. Nietzsche never had the time to make a proper study of Shakespeare, but what he did say added an unusual dimension to Shakespeare. We examined the role of the tragic in Nietzsche's thought at the hand of Shakespeare in Chapter 9.

It is particularly fitting that the final chapter deals with Emerson, with whom Nietzsche discovered the power of personal self-invention. Answers, if they are given at all, are usually given in final chapters, and the closest Nietzsche ever came to offering a final answer is to urge his readers to give style to their existence. In this chapter, we briefly explore Emerson's influence on Nietzsche. Space is obviously limited, and we can only explore the key terms, such as perfectionism and freedom.

Notes

- ^{1.} Donna Tartt (1999) *The Secret History*. London: Penguin.
- ^{2.} This is why atheism never stands a chance with hard-line capitalists.
- ^{3.} Grayling, A. C. (2007) *Towards the Light: The Story of the Struggles for Liberty and Rights That Made the Modern West*. London: Bloomsbury.
- ^{4.} Grayling, 256.
- ^{5.} Richard II, III.ii.
- ^{6.} O'Neill, E. (1988) *Mourning becomes Electra*. New York: Simon and Schuster, p. vi.

Chapter 1

Englishmen Underground; or the Case of the Abdicated Playwright

Francis Bacon would have redeemed himself in Nietzsche's eyes if he had turned out to be Shakespeare. We can see from *Ecce Homo (EH)*, 'Why I am so Clever', section 4, that he indeed entertained the idea: 'I am instinctively certain that Lord Bacon is the originator of this uncanniest species of literature'. A man who has dealt with truth to the extent that Bacon did, *must* have been an artist too. What makes Bacon particularly disappointing in Nietzsche's view, was his failure to live up to this status: instead of fathering English tragedy, he merely chose to inaugurate a scientific method that took man out of the world and even set him up in opposition to it. This, however, still makes him an artist, only a much lesser one.

Nietzsche mentions Bacon exactly seven times. While he obviously did not obsess about him to the extent that he did over a figure like Wagner, a few significant references make it clear that Bacon represents important aspects of the philosophical tradition against which Nietzsche defines himself. Since Bacon wrote at the beginning of modernity, he played a key role in shaping the direction modernity was to take, particularly its evaluation of the truth question. It is possible to argue that the problems one encounters over Nietzsche's conception of truth is largely due to a readership that, for all its postmodernist protestations to the contrary, is still firmly steeped in the Baconian tradition. This tradition sees truth as a fundamental underlying condition or state of affairs to be discovered, and the language used in getting there as mere unavoidable baggage: as Samuel Johnson had said about footnotes elucidating obscure parts in Shakespeare, a necessary evil. 'Truth', in other words, is that which happens when we read the world well, and if we do not find it, it is due to our faulty methods, not to the structural limitations placed upon us due to our situatedness in time, space, body or linguistic community.

In Nietzsche's view, modern philosophy took off on a wild goose chase after truth, while simply taking its attainment for granted, and without inquiring even once whether that earnestly sought truth indeed serves life.

What makes Bacon so objectionable, is his delusion that his scientific investigation will automatically improve the conditions of life not only for his countrymen, but for the entire world.

It is interesting, however, to note the similarities between Nietzsche and the philosopher whose thoughts contain the germ of what would become positivism: both saw the works of their predecessors as being vitiated by an unjustifiable reverence of authority, and a consequent neglect of actual experience. To remedy this, both thinkers invented a new method that would transform the philosophical discourse to follow in their wake, and in doing this, both of them made a point of explicitly 'sounding out idols'. What set Bacon's inductive method and Nietzsche's genealogy apart however, are their respective motivations. For Bacon, the task of the philosopher is a simple one, the amelioration of human life through the achievement of power over nature, using the combined forces of philosophical speculation and the craft-skills employed by the practical arts. Bacon's method is an 'innocent' one – at this early stage in the march of modernity, there is no question about the role of human perspective and motive in the shaping of method. The world would naturally yield to his advances. Knowledge is power, and when embodied in the form of new technical inventions and mechanical discoveries it is the force that drives history.

The distinguishing feature of Bacon's epistemology is of course his faith in the method of induction. This method implies that the world can be read like a book; his method smells of Protestantism and the printing press. Nietzsche lists Bacon under the great philosophers for whom philosophy was a question of method, that is, a kind of treasure hunt for knowledge under the right conditions. In Aphorism 11394, written between autumn 1887 and March 1888 (KSA 12.368) he made the following remark: 'The great methodologists: Aristotle, Bacon, Descartes, A. Comte'. Although the case of Aristotle is much more complex – that the ancients did not pay *enough* attention to method is one of Bacon's main objections against them – they all share one idea in particular, namely the notion that the right method would liberate man from his situatedness and prejudices and grant him *real* knowledge. Bacon's method is of course so famous, and by now so basic that it hardly needs explication. Unlike Descartes, whose revolutionary method involved *a priori* reasoning to indubitable truths, Bacon advocated a purely empirical method which, starting from observations and particular events, would move towards wider and wider generalization. He improved upon existing conceptions of scientific method by expounding a method that was more than mere simple enumeration. From the viewpoint of a demonstrable

natural science, all particulars were suspect, since all instances of induction no matter how lengthy or carefully done, could guarantee their conclusions but provisionally. Anomalous particulars, for whose clarification empirical science really existed, were particularly problematic. From an ontological perspective, they were the result of variability and coincidence, and could not serve as a foundation for a philosophy based upon universals or regularities. Furthermore, such exceptions provided psychological fodder for superstition and scepticism, two pitfalls Bacon was eager to avoid. He therefore insisted upon the need for checking generalizations by a 'search for negative instances'. With this, he initiated the concern with the nature of inductive or probable reasoning so prominent in the British tradition, which made an important appearance in John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic* (published a year before Nietzsche's birth) and would be taken to logical conclusion in Karl Popper's notion of falsification.

According to Nietzsche in *BGE*, section 252, Francis Bacon's neat distinctions 'signify an attack on the philosophical spirit'. For Bacon, first of all, it is possible to draw a rigid distinction between physics and metaphysics. The former investigates variable and particular causes, the latter reflects on general and constant ones, for which the term *form* is used. *Forms* are more general than the four Aristotelian causes and that is why Bacon's discussion of the forms of substances as the most general properties of matter is the last step for the human mind when investigating nature. Metaphysics is distinct from *philosophia prima*. The latter marks the position in the system where general categories of a general theory of science are treated first as universal categories of thought, and secondly, as relevant for all disciplines. To his credit, however, final causes are discredited, since they lead to difficulties in science and tempt us to amalgamate theological and teleological points of doctrine. At the summit of Bacon's pyramid of knowledge are the laws of nature (the most general principles). At its base the pyramid starts with observations, which, if properly done, are value-free and objective, moves on to invariant relations and then to more inclusive correlations until it reaches the stage of forms. The process of generalization ascends from natural history via physics towards metaphysics, whereas accidental correlations and relations are eliminated by the method of exclusion. It must be emphasized that *metaphysics* has a special meaning for Bacon. This concept first excludes the infinity of individual experience by generalization with a teleological focus and second, opens our mind to generate more possibilities for the efficient application of general laws.

Bacon is remembered in particular for giving this method a name, and raising what was hitherto mere common sense to the status of scientific method and giving it an entirely new importance. The word 'induction' itself is not used too frequently, but in the *Novum Organum* it is used in particular to qualify an intellectual behaviour and logical procedure that are supposed to be entirely new.

From a hermeneutical perspective there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a genuine break with the past. Even the idea that one has to break with the past in order to find a legitimate basis for one's thought, has a history, and the history of this idea is closely intertwined with the history of the 'break' between antiquity and the new order of Christianity. Bacon's thought is to a certain extent already the product of history, rather than its originator. The *Novum Organum* has a distinctly religious flavour: Bacon was relying on 'divine assistance' and he held that natural histories should be collected with 'religious care'.

In contrast to John Donne, who in true Hesiodian fashion wrote in a poem published six years after *The Advancement of Learning*, 'Our age is iron, and rusty too' (Donne 1986: 45) Bacon advanced the notion that history may in fact be progressive, that is, moving in an onward and even upward ascent, and not merely in a cyclical fashion as Aristotle – and in a strangely transformed way, Nietzsche too – held. In the *Advancement of Learning*, the idea is offered hesitantly, more like a kind of hopeful hypothesis. But in later works such as the *New Organon*, it becomes a very real theory, so much so that it can almost be regarded as a promised destiny: Enlightenment and a better world, Bacon insists, lie within our power; they require only the cooperation of learned citizens and the active development of the arts and sciences. In this work, Bacon writes: 'Now the true and lawful goal of the sciences is none other than this: that human life be endowed with new discoveries and powers' (Bacon 1960: 18). The key concept here is efficiency, Bacon is no mere innocent defender of induction. For one, he refuses to acknowledge limits. In one of his soaring flights of fancy he writes:

Above all, if a man could succeed, not in striking out some particular invention, however useful, but in kindling a light in nature – a light which should by its very rising touch and illuminate all border regions that confine upon the circle of our present state of knowledge, and so spreading further and further should presently disclose *all* that is hidden and most secret in the world. (Bacon 1980: 62)

Enlightenment thinking, that epitome of human self-assertion, is essentially optimistic: where faith failed, reason will succeed. Or rather, if faith provided the way back to innocence, reason would restore man's dominion over nature. As he states towards the end of *The New Atlantis*: 'the end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes and the secret motions of things and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible'. For Bacon, science had a collaborative, and above all, *democratic* character, with individual achievements contributing to its overall success. The extension of man's power over nature is not the work of a private investigator who keeps his findings secret, but the fruit of an organized community funded (hopefully) by the state. For Bacon, the ideal scientist forms part of an enlightened community of Platonic rulers, willing to share knowledge – among themselves. In the *Redargutio philosophiarum* he portrays such a community, a theme that would grow to utopian extreme in *The New Atlantis*:

Then he told me in Paris that a friend had taken him along and introduced him to a gathering, 'the sight of which', he said, 'would rejoice your eyes. It was the happiest experience of my life'. There were some fifty men there, all of mature year, not a young man among them, all bearing the stamp of dignity and probity. . . . At his entry, they were chatting easily among themselves but sitting in rows as if expecting somebody. Not long after, there entered a man of peaceful and serene air, save that his face had become habituated to the expression of pity . . . he took his seat, not on a platform or pulpit, but on a level with the rest and delivered the following address. (Bacon 1968: III, 559)

Bacon propounded this article of secular faith with evangelical force and a sense of mission that would put many a clergyman to shame. With the Fall, Bacon held, man had renounced his original power. But all was not lost, the true end of knowledge was nothing less than 'a restitution and reinvesting... of man to the sovereignty and power . . . which he had in his first state of creation' (Bacon 1968: III, 222). Not that this would surprise Nietzsche in the slightest. Scientific reason, for all its protests to the contrary, has its roots in the Christian faith in a beneficent order, perhaps even an agent, behind the apparent chaos of the world. Even Christian virtues like humility and charity play a role in Bacon's method: a lack of vanity was taken to be a measure of the truth of a scientific work, and scientific work was seen as a form of charity towards one's fellow man. The doctrine of 'sounding out idols' suggested too, that opposition to this new method was

a kind of heresy, to be smashed by Baconian induction. From a Nietzschean perspective, the underlying assumption that man and nature will of necessity be on the same page, is far less radical than Bacon's biographers usually assume. For all his scientific interest in the world, Bacon too exhibits the anti-worldly ethos that Nietzsche considered to be the defining characteristic of Christianity in general and the Protestant tradition in particular. Bacon complains for example, that men – although possessing a 'natural inclination to know' too seldom push that capacity into the service of all mankind:

As if there were sought in knowledge a couch, whereupon to rest a searching and a restless spirit; for a wandering and varying mind to walk up and down with a fair prospect; or a tower of state, for a proud mind to raise itself upon; or a fort or a commanding ground, for strife and contention; or a shop, for profit and sale; and not a rich storehouse, for the glory of the Creator and the *relief of man's estate*. (My emphasis, Bacon 1873: 259)

What strikes one at once in this paragraph is the fact that man's estate, the human condition, requires relief or redemption. For a man who was almost credited with writing the works of Shakespeare, Bacon has the distinctly *anti*-tragic attitude of Christianity itself. Whether or not his protestations against atheism were done in a spirit of authenticity or not, Bacon sees human vulnerability, be it physiological pain, socio-political conditions or the fundamental character of existence in itself, as something to be redressed by knowledge. And at this stage, this is a very real possibility. In *The Advancement of Learning* he states: 'Learning conquers or mitigates the fear of death and adverse fortune'.¹

For all the protests to the contrary, there *is* a distinctly utopian element in Bacon's writing. In the *Cogitata et visa* he writes explicitly:

It may be that there are some on whose ear my frequent and honourable mention of practical activities makes a harsh and displeasing sound because they are wholly given over in love and reverence to contemplation. Let them bethink themselves that they are the enemies of their own desires. For in Nature, practical results are not only the means to improve their well-being, but the guarantee of truth. The rule of religion, that a man should show his faith by his works, holds good in natural philosophy too. Science also must be known by works. It is by the witness of works, rather than by logic or even observation, that truth is revealed and established. Whence it follows that the improvement of

man's mind, *and the improvement of his lot is one and the same thing.* (My emphasis, Bacon 1973: 612)

Nietzsche, the lover of masks and the defender of illusion, could never forgive Christianity for introducing one illusion in particular to the world: the illusion that the source of 'all our woe', namely the world itself, and the subject that suffers in it, can be rendered transparent and brought under rational control. Simply put, Bacon argued that error and uncertainty arose because the wrong method was employed; in particular, experience and observation were not correctly used. Bacon reveals his alchemistic origins in his philosophical acts of subtraction. Like an alchemist who, through a process of careful distillation, hopes to reveal the essential ore of a precious metal, so Bacon, in early enlightenment fashion, hopes to remove the unnecessary elements that prevent our direct access to the things themselves. Drawing on standard Christian metaphor, Bacon calls these obscuring elements 'idols of the mind' that stand in the way of our worshipping of the true 'God' namely pure, unadulterated sense experience. He writes: 'The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds' (Bacon 1960: Aphorism XIV). Once we have become attached to some habit of reading regularity into the world where it does not really belong, we tend to discount any experience which does not fit our preconceptions.

The human understanding, when it has once adopted an opinion (either as being the received opinion or as being agreeable to itself) draws all things to support and agree with it. And though there be a greater number and weight of instances to be found on the other side, yet these it either neglects or despises, or else by some distinction sets aside and rejects, in order that by this great and pernicious predetermination the authority of its former conclusions may remain inviolate. (Bacon 1960: Aphorism XIV)

For Bacon this is an enormous problem. One almost detects a conspiracy theory of error and uncertainty, that the valiant rationalist must attack and defeat, using the right method. Revealing his immersion in the Christian framework again, he draws upon the famous image of Christian rebirth as a precondition for inheriting eternal life, this time, however, the reward is not heaven, but true knowledge. We 'are to become as little children', who observe the world with an innocent eye undistorted by prejudice.

The understanding must be completely cleared and freed [of prejudice] so that access to the kingdom of man, which I founded upon the sciences,

may resemble that of the Kingdom of Heaven, where no admission is conceded except to children. (Bacon 1960: Aphorism LXVIII)

One idol to be sounded out is the rhetorical 'decorations' that 'pollute' pure rational discourse. To see how pervasive this prejudice against the 'superfluous' stretches, it is necessary to refer to the droll Johnson again: 'A dictionary of the English language might be compiled from Bacon's works alone' (Johnson 1978: 112). This implies that Bacon used a 'neutral' or 'plain', if elegant, language that directly corresponds to reality. As early as Bacon's *Instauratio*, there is a clear distinction between 'essential' knowledge, which refers basically to empirical knowledge, and the 'superfluous' or merely 'decoratory' forms of knowledge. Like the genuine Renaissance man that he was, Bacon considered not only science, but also the entire scope of his contemporary culture. Within this scope, he finds a variety of forms of knowledge and puts them into three distinct categories. First are the *Empirics* (who include magicians, alchemists, dyers, chemists and artisans in general; in short everyone who transforms materials and creates something else from them). Then there are the *Philosophers or Reasoners*, who identify all knowledge with dispute and dialectic, and finally the *Humanists* who associate knowledge with mere affectations and tend to identify knowledge with rhetoric, words and graceful oratory style (Bacon 1973: 282). While this tripartite of sophistry is replaced in the *Novum Organum* by new examples of false learning, it is significant that Bacon separates knowledge from the language within which it is conceived, thereby inaugurating the long philosophical tradition of the suppression of metaphor that would be turned upon its head by Nietzsche.

There is something distinctly soteriological about the ideal of objectivity itself. Soteriology can take many forms, but be it religious, psycho-analytical, philosophical or economical, such narratives usually begin with a grand claim that humanity (or in some cases, only part of it, as the obvious case of Marxism suggests) has become estranged or alienated from something of fundamental importance and then proceed to describe the remedy by which this estrangement is to be overcome. Bacon practices a kind of *epistemological* soteriology by searching for an original experience of direct objectivity before the inevitable pollution by human perspective.

Throughout his work, Nietzsche opposes this spectatorial paradigm of rationalism which emphasizes clarity and certitude over passion and will. Rather than critiquing the primacy of sight, however, he suggests that men should use a new mode of productive, poetic vision to enrich their lives. The disinterested spectator tends to think of Truth almost in quantifiable

terms: *the* truth, which must be hunted down and captured at all costs. This is precisely his problem with Bacon: instead of rejoicing in man's capacity to be a player on life's stage, Bacon turned him into a mere spectator. Wherever man posits 'non-contradictory ideals' (*unwidersprechlichen Ideale*) there is in a truth a *spectacle*: '*eine Schauspielerei (wie bei Bacon)*' as Nietzsche writes in a note from the *Nachlass* (Aphorism 5860, Spring 1881–Summer 1882, KSA 9.476). Coming from the Latin *spectaculum* 'to look', the modern word has connotations of something put on display, deliberately turned into an object for viewing, and put at a distance from the viewer himself. As always when writing on Bacon, Nietzsche allows for associations with the stage to creep in: what is so problematic for Nietzsche is that Bacon allowed for a gap to develop between viewer and viewed, instead of exploiting the dramatic possibilities implied by spectatorship.

Nietzsche denies that the quest for objectivity arises from a desire to do justice to the facts because modern man lacks the stern will required for just action. Instead, an *evaluative* notion of truth is required. As we shall see, truth is created, not discovered, and it should be done based on the needs of the present. For Nietzsche, objectivity is a mere ruse, a refuge for those who refuse to enact their judgements upon the world. This is a typical attitude of the latecomers upon the historical scene. They are not objective, only *impotent*. In the second *UM* he states that historical education and the bourgeois coat tend to go together, prompting him to ask: 'Is a race of eunuchs needed to watch over the great historical world-harem? Pure objectivity would certainly characterize such a race' (*UM* II, 5).

Central to Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism is his account of modernity. The description of the loss in modernity of a centre of gravity recalls other critics' examinations of modernity, most notably that of Karl Marx, who famously described his age as one where all 'fixed fast-frozen relationships are swept away...all that is solid melts into air'. Authors like Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and even Charles Baudelaire located these changes in the deteriorating material conditions of the contemporary urban society, but Nietzsche insists that the crisis of modernity was largely one of values, specifically of the internal logic of Western cultural values. This logic is one of a persistent belief in metaphysical certitude. Much of Western thought *pace* Bacon is consequently devoted to the problem of establishing a grounding for cultural values when the time for such a thing was clearly over, and the age of what Hannah Arendt has called 'thinking without a banister' had arrived. Trying to impart this message to his audience, Nietzsche adopts a genealogical strategy and returns again and again to the origins of the *epistemophilia* so prominent in Western philosophy

since the seventeenth century. In the case of the erroneous claims metaphysics makes to 'knowledge', the motivating force is the 'pathos of truth'. This pathos demands fixity, static conceptual points of reference around which a network of beliefs can be nurtured. This 'truth' comes to be stabilized and eventually fixed by means of concepts, and as such, becomes capable of being *owned*. 'Philosophy and religion [are] a longing for property' (PHTG 60). So much for pure objectivity.

This 'English' morality (which is not of course limited to the English) is the apotheosis of a long developed anti-worldly and anti-tragic ethos that bluntly refuses to acknowledge the gap between human experience and the independent operation of the world, the world as a realm distinct from and indifferent to the human subject, which realm Nietzsche rethinks as the eternal recurrence. There is a certain small-mindedness, characteristic of the humanist subject at his most petty, to the notion that the world was made to *fit* man and that it is merely a question of bringing man into harmony with a given worldly order.

Until genealogy arrived on the philosophical scene, philosophers have secretly regarded themselves as code-breakers rather than creators, and their task as uncovering the elusive rational order beneath all chaos. Finding the blueprint to life would naturally enable us to finally control the uncontrollable, and that, of course, is bourgeois or slave heaven:

In all seriousness: the innocence of our thinkers is somehow touching and evokes reverence, when today they still step before consciousness with the request that it should please give them honest answers; for example, whether it is 'real', and why it so resolutely keeps the external world at a distance, and other questions of that kind. The faith in 'immediate certainties' is a moral naiveté that reflects honor on us philosophers; but – after all we should not be 'merely moral' men. Apart from morality, this faith is a stupidity that reflects little honor on us. (BGE 34)

Modernity would have it that depth is the dimension of truth. However, depth is a deceptive dimension in Nietzsche: there is such a thing as going *too* deep. The subject itself was born in response to the need to find something stable, something beyond change. In Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* the term *subjectum* refers to that upon which all other entities are predicated without itself being a predicate of something else. The search for this fountainhead became the aim of nearly all of modern philosophy in one way or another, with the noteworthy exception of David Hume. According to Michel Foucault, depth is not an essential quality of either selves or the

world. It is a dimension that comes into being as a correlate of a variety of technologies that operates upon the self, and structures its relationship with the world. Philosophical ‘divers’, who venture deep into the folds of subjectivity in the hope of finding a ‘real’ self, are however bound to come up with nothing, or even worse, lose themselves entirely in the labyrinth of language. For Nietzsche, with his healthy proto-Hellenic outlook, there is such a thing as descending so far that depth becomes counterproductive:

Order of rank. There are, first of all, superficial thinkers; secondly, deep thinkers – those who go down into the depth of a thing; thirdly, thorough thinkers, who thoroughly explore the grounds of a thing – which is worth very much more than merely going down into depths! – finally those who stick their heads into the swamp: which ought not to be a sign either of depth or of thoroughness! They are the dear departed underground. (D 446)

There is no better way to escape the world than to go underground. And no better place for the artist who refuses his vocation in order to flee than into the depths of finite rules and absolute facts. Bacon is a case of the artist refusing his vocation – for Bacon *was* an artist – and thereby abandoning that which makes him most human. Given the enormity of the tradition that sprang up in his footsteps, one can say that Bacon *was* an artist and he *did* legislate, only in such a way as to make the end of creation and artistic legislation an end in itself.

We know, however, from Bacon’s own hand that he was by no means indifferent to the aesthetic domain. Bacon’s style is as integral to his project as is Nietzsche’s to his, and it is particularly interesting to note the extent to which both thinkers made use of the aphorism. Despite Zarathustra’s protestations, great minds sometimes *do* think alike. In his work *L’Entretien Infini*, Maurice Blanchot indicates that no trope disturbs the apparently snug sense of full textual presence quite as much as an aphorism – the short terse, incisive remark that responds to the genius and inspiration of a critical mind, but it resists all forms of catechism and formalization. It is a turn of phrase and thought that directs itself beyond a fixed idea, a fixed place-holder in a system of rules or beliefs. Nietzsche’s relationship to the aphorism is decidedly more complex than that of Bacon, whose easily remembered aphorisms are aimed at bolstering foundations, not to subvert them. Nietzsche provides an interesting reason for writing in aphorism. By employing this mode, Nietzsche goes against the grain of traditional philosophical literature. His style requires

expansive rather than abbreviated techniques of interpretation that leaves much more room for play and margin for error than traditional philosophy. He writes: 'I am brief, my readers must become long and comprehensive in order to bring up and together all that I have thought and thought deep down' (*EH* 340). Bacon, for all his attempts at clarity and certainty, is not really that different. Bacon's mother famously describes her son's writing as 'enigmatic, folded writing' and Stanley Fish demonstrates how Bacon's *Essays* exemplifies his attitude by breaking the mind's passivity, and aiding the resistance to its natural propensity to remain in the comfort zone of common opinions. Fish goes as far as to describe the *Essays* as 'unfinished' – a very Nietzschean compliment – and likens the reading of a Baconian essay to the reading of *two* essays: the Bacon's original text, and the text that develops between the reader and the original text. Because of their richness, the promise they hold, they force the reader to become *active* in his engagement with the text. The reader has to 'fill in' the text, allow it to become part of his referential framework, so that – as Gadamer might have said – a process of exchange between the text and the reader can take place.

What is more, importantly, is that the text is only the most obvious form of exchange between self and world, or as a cynical anti-postmodernist might have said, the most analysable. According to Nietzsche, what can be said about the text, is also true of mere observation. Everything that happens consists of a group of phenomena that are gathered and selected by an interpretative being.

Despite Nietzsche's appeal to a more *natural* man (*GMI*, 6), there is no *physis* without *nomos*. Nietzsche does not simply unite the two; he has rethought their relationship entirely, suggesting that what we call *physis*, nature or the world, is nothing more than an illusion that we create through the *nomos*, because we forget that the law, or metaphysical framework within which we operate, is itself merely a human convention. *Nomos* creates *physis* through generality: we become so accustomed to our rules and habits that they begin to pass for nature. What Baconian humanists tend to forget, is that it is their own participation in the world that makes experience of a *world* possible (see, for example, Aphorism 11393, *Nachgelassen Fragmente* (*NL*) 85–88, *KSA* 12.366). Even mere perception is a selective, world-constitutive operation in the manner of that ultimate impersonal 'artist', the will to power. This means that there is an aesthetic dimension even to man's simplest judgements.

You sober people who feel well-armed against passion and fantasies and would like to turn your emptiness into a matter of pride and an

ornament: you call yourselves realists and hint that the world really is the way it appears to you. As if reality stood unveiled before you only, and you yourselves were perhaps the best part of it. [...] You are still burdened with those estimates which have their origins in the passions of loves of former centuries. Your sobriety still contains a secret and extinguishable drunkenness. Your love of 'reality' for example – oh that is a primeval 'love'. Every feeling and sensation contains a piece of this old love; and some fantasy, some prejudice, some fear and so much else has contributed to it, and worked on it. That mountain there! That cloud there! What is 'real' in that? Subtract the phantasm and every human *contribution* from it, my sober friends! If you *can*! If you can forget your descent, your past, your training – all of your humanity and animality. There is no reality for us – not for you either, my sober friends. We are not nearly so different as you think, and perhaps our good will to transcend intoxication is as respectable as your faith that you are incapable of intoxication. (GS 57)

Note however, that Nietzsche takes it for granted that there *is* a cloud, that there *is* a mountain. He is not engaging in juvenile hypotheses about the existence of the material objects in question. For Bacon, knowledge ended with its collection and its categorization. For Nietzsche, this is merely the beginning. How one employs a particular notion, what it means in one's context, and what it says about the knower, is far more important than its being verified as 'correct'. For Bacon, method is a way to liberate man from his necessary perspectival existence; for Nietzsche, it is perspective that makes method possible in the first place. It makes *everything*, including thinking itself possible, and is therefore a fact to be celebrated, not to be denied or wished away. Perspective makes man by *necessity* an artist; it is perhaps Nature at her most democratic.

I interpret therefore I am. Like Moliere's bourgeois gentleman, who had been speaking prose for 40 years without realizing it, we have been artists all along, this despite our most earnest efforts to be metaphysicians or 'scientists' and discover the thing-in-itself, the final truth beyond any interpretation. For Nietzsche, all interpretation is creation inasmuch as it is engaged in the reinterpretation and reconfiguration of the world. As will be demonstrated throughout this book, every intellectual construction or category imposed upon the world, notwithstanding its claims to 'objectivity', has an artistic and therefore subjective dimension to it. Art carries out a selective, world-constitutive operation in the manner of that ultimate impersonal 'artist', the will to power.

To interpret is to see in a particular way, at the expense of other possibilities of interpretation. We ourselves are the source of this interpretative injustice, or more correctly, our need for a world in which it is possible to live, is the source. To a certain extent, then, man is the measure of the world, but only *his* world. In a note from the *Nachlass* he writes: 'Is the world for us not merely a construction under a measure? As soon as this arbitrary measure disappears, dies the world!' (Aphorism 5797, *NL* 82–84, *KSA* 9.454). Man is thus a contingent measure and our measurements do not refer to an original, underlying reality. What we call reality is the result not only of our limited perspectives upon the world, but the *interplay* of those perspectives themselves.

In another note, written about four years later, Nietzsche writes:

The history of philosophy is a secret raging against the preconditions of life, against the value feeling of life, against partisanship in favour of life. Philosophers have never hesitated to affirm a world, provided that contradicted this world and furnished them with a pretext for speaking ill of the world. It has hitherto been the grand school of slander, and it has imposed itself to such an extent today that our science, which proclaims itself the advocate of life, has accepted the basic slanderous position, and treated this world as apparent, this chain of causes as mere phenomenal. What is it that really hates here? (*WP* 461, Mar.–June 1888)

This is good, no great news. Creativity, which since Euripides, Socrates and Plato has been treated with such contempt, is in Nietzsche's eyes not only the last remedy against nihilism but also man's greatest gift. It is impossible to think of value itself without some form of perspectivism. As Nietzsche writes in *WP* 244 (Nov. 1887–Mar. 1888):

Knowledge and wisdom have in themselves no value; no more than goodness: one must first be in possession of the goal from which these qualities derive their value or non-value – there *could* be a goal in the light of which great knowledge might represent a great disvalue, if for instance, a high degree of deception were one of the prerequisites for the enhancement of life; likewise if goodness were perhaps able to paralyze and discourage the springs of great longing.

Had we access to true objectivity, nearly every question a human being can ask would be superfluous: every answer would be known. No one would ever need to give his version of how he understood the world. The job would

already have been done. Despite the obvious impossibility of ever attaining this state, modern philosophy, in particular transcendental philosophy, has aimed explicitly for a *telos* of absolute, self-identical truth, whether in terms of the great beyond or in the ideal state. Consequently, the unavoidable activity of judgement has been treated as something provisional, a question to be suspended once the perfect goal has been reached.

'The death of God', mentioned by Zarathustra after his encounter with the hermit, and explicitly announced by the madman in the GS 25, is in fact the death of Bacon's God. It is the death of omniscience itself. Omniscience is not limited to divinity, but is one of humanism's most characteristic hopes: the positing of a transcendental subject that is capable of knowing it all.

From perspectival limitations, however, springs the potential for creation, the supreme justification for human existence. As we shall see later, Nietzsche evaluates human 'types' according to their ability to face their inevitably perspectival existence and make the most of it. This is of crucial importance for understanding the master/slave dichotomy, the task of genealogy and the operation of the will to power. The immediate consequence of affirming the plurality of perspectives is a re-evaluation of the concept of objectivity. The myth of objectivity, whether understood aesthetically, as the ideal of objects that paint or photograph themselves by their own activity on a purely passive medium, or epistemologically, as 'truth', is summarily dealt with: 'this is a myth' (*UM* II, KSA 1.290). Nietzsche is adamant that the 'will to be objective' is 'a modern misunderstanding'. Objective truth implies an implausible selective affinity between the knower and the known. The ideal of objectivity is ridiculous in aesthetics, and shallow and decadent in the domain of epistemology. The myth of objectivity is also unfruitful, because it makes us forget that the moment of apprehension is a creative moment, the moment when human beings are at their best. The goal of disinterested contemplation presupposes conceptual fictions and requires the positing of a disembodied disinterested knower, 'an eye turned in no particular direction'. This is one of modernity's strangest characteristics: the tendency to take man *out* of nature in order to observe it. As Hans-Georg Gadamer has shown, within Western metaphysics, the 'objectivist' conception of nature simply as a collection of 'things' is the complement to a 'subjectivistic' notion of the self as isolated and disembodied (Gadamer 1967: 48–49).

For Nietzsche, the price demanded by the spectatorial tradition of rationalism that posits the thinker as a judge who masters reality through

his disinterested reflections, was too high: 'Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all the prerogatives of man: how dearly they have been bought!' (*GM* II, 3). There are two reasons for this: man has sacrificed his creativity for it, and as we shall see in our subsequent references to *GM*, man has tortured himself into a radically reduced form of humanity in order to attain a goal that is unattainable.

Nietzsche tries to account for the affective components and influencing factors discounted by traditional epistemology. His reconstituted version of 'objectivity', usually indicated by quotation marks, acknowledges that knowledge is a function of the embodied expression of affective investment in the world. This, however, should under no circumstances be equated with relativism. Instead, his 'panoptics' is an attempt to salvage the possibility of knowledge in the light of the failure of traditional epistemology to provide a usable body of knowledge based on disaffected, disinterested contemplation:

But, as people who seek knowledge, the last thing we should do is to be ungrateful for such determined reversals of customary perspectives and evaluations with which the spirit has for so long raged against itself, with such apparent wickedness and futility. To use this for once to see differently, the will to see things differently, is no small discipline and preparation of the intellect for its coming 'objectivity,' and not in the sense of 'disinterested contemplation' (which is conceptual nonsense), but as the capability of having power over one's positive and negative arguments and to raise them and dispose of them so that one knows how to make the various perspectives and interpretations of emotions useful for knowledge. (*GM* III, 12, *KSA* 5.365)

Perspectives, for Nietzsche, are not disembodied points of view hovering disinterestedly over the world. Instead of trying to do away with the notion of perspective, which Nietzsche describes as an act of self-directed castration; we should appropriate the multiplicity of perspectives for a more complete vision of the world. Nietzsche is no minimalist. When it comes to perspectivism, less (or fewer) is not more; more is more. Rather than to see Nietzsche as having no theory of truth, as Maudemarie Clark thinks, it would perhaps be better to describe Nietzsche's theory of truth as the transformation of the traditional picture of truth as an object to be re- or uncovered into a theory of truth as an *event*: the truth is not out there,

waiting to be found, but happens between observer and observed. Since our conceptual apparatus is so similar, there is never really a problem of absolute relativism. We simply *have* to agree on certain basic facts about the world. All the same, Nietzsche recommends a plurality of perspectives as guarantee for truth.

The only seeing we have is seeing from a perspective; the only knowledge we have is knowledge from a perspective. The more emotional affects we allow to be expressed in words concerning something, the more eyes, different eyes, we know how to train on the same thing, the more complete our 'idea' of this thing, our 'objectivity,' will be. But to eliminate the will in general, to suspend all our emotions without exception – even if we were capable of that – what would that be? Wouldn't we call that castrating the intellect? (GM III, 12, KSA 5.365)

Perspectivism thus implies that knowledge is only really possible once our affective engagement with the world is acknowledged. Until this happens, we can at best speak of a desiccated, anaemic simulacrum of knowledge. Nietzsche's rehabilitation of the metaphoric of vision in pluralist form returns the knower to his body, suffused with affect, inextricably situated in the world and inscribed by the torment and pain inflicted by moralizing mores and disciplining institutions. The task of the *Wissenschaftler* is to compile as exhaustive an aggregation of radically different perspectives as possible, a chorus of situated voices. In most cases, an overlapping consensus ensures that we have enough of a world in common to make a meaningful conversation about reality possible. The insistence upon locating a single 'correct' perspective leads, paradoxically, to an endangerment of truth, for even a rich perspective is and remains but that: a perspective steeped in a unique set of prejudices. Any absolute perspective, no matter how rich and how 'correct', leads inevitably to a diminution of knowledge and an impoverished, ascetic existence. By insisting upon a model of nature as merely an object to be analysed according to the correct method, Bacon has not really conquered Nature. It implies that man still plays according to her rules, her problems and her puzzles. This is a perfect example of negative freedom: the capacity to react only to external stimuli instead of being a legislator to that outside world. In *EH*, Nietzsche associates freedom with those that are capable of showing initiative, and to truly *act*, as opposed to those who are capable of reacting only to external stimuli. Those who remain only scholars are particularly guilty of this:

The scholar, who really does nothing except 'trundle' with books finally loses the ability to think for himself. If he does not trundle, he does not think. He replies to a stimulus – a thought he has read – finally, he does nothing but react. (*EH* II, 8)

According to Nietzsche, this is particularly true of those who followed in Bacon's footsteps. In the following chapters, we shall see that there is a marked difference between those who merely reacted upon Nature – also a text in her own right – and those who were truly able to legislate.

If Bacon *disguised* his scientific ambition and embraced his role as artist, the ultimately nihilistic division between poet/artist and philosopher might never have occurred. But to *deny* one's status as artist-legislator is one of the most nihilistic acts possible. From his earliest unpublished manuscripts to his last writings, Nietzsche consistently presents legislation, or the declaration of the highest values, as the real function of the philosopher. There is a comprehensive kind of thought that gathers together, assigns value to and orders all existing knowledge of the world. *Genuine* philosophers, however, are commanders and legislators. Nietzsche adds the following: philosophers alone determine the 'whither' and 'wherefore', what is useful and what constitutes utility for men. Plato was such a philosopher. He did not merely dissimulate; he 'deceived' himself when he convinced himself that 'the good' as *he* desired it was 'what a man named Plato had chanced to discover on his way' (Aphorism 10490, *NL* 84–85, *KSA* 11.611).

It would however be a misconception to think that just because Nietzsche sees truth in constructivist terms, that any old fantasy would do. Contrary to readers who see him purely as a mortal Hermes, defender of tale-spinners, liars and illusionists, Nietzsche despises those who cannot face the facticity that accompanies authentic existence. It is precisely those who are unable to live in the real world that engage in fictitious flights and imagined realities in which they do not suffer. Nietzsche writes in this regard:

Who alone has grounds to lie himself out of actuality? He who suffers from it. But to suffer from actuality is to be a misfortunate actuality. ... The preponderance of unpleasurable feelings over pleasurable feelings is the cause of fictitious morality and religion: such a preponderance however, provides the formulae for decadence. (*The Antichrist* (A) 15)

A hint for utilitarians! If one is to lie, lie well: be feminine, and don a mask. A badly told lie has a nasty habit of becoming Truth, as we shall see in our discussion on language. Bacon made a big mistake when he suggested that

Nature be treated as valuable spouse, not as courtesan or slave. Quite aside from the morality of objectifying woman/Nature as subject matter for the penetrating glance of the philosopher/scientist, it is folly even to try. One of Nietzsche's most famous openings for a book reads as follows:

Supposing truth to be a woman – what? Is the suspicion not well-founded that all philosophers, when they have been dogmatists, have had little understanding of woman? That the gruesome earnestness, the clumsy importunity with which they have been in the habit of approaching truth has been inept and improper means for winning a wench. Certainly, she has not let herself be won – and today every kind of dogmatism stands sad and discouraged. *If it continues to stand at all! (BGE, Preface)*

Nietzsche's wild woman cannot be domesticated, only be played with, and she loves only warriors. In the chapters that follow, we shall see what happens when the arch-domesticator, the Englishman, tries his hand at Nietzsche's Woman-Truth, and in Chapter 7, what a betrayed femininity can do.

Note

¹ Bacon is fond of quoting Virgil's famous

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas

Quique metus omnes, et inorabile fatum

Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari –

'Happy is the man who has learned the causes of things'.

Chapter 2

Hobbes against the World

If Bacon took man out of the world, Hobbes took the next logical step and turned him into a machine; an erratic, passionate machine in need of a safety-catch. But the laws of nature, themselves but constructions of the human mind, fell short of providing such a safety-catch, and in the end, Thomas Hobbes could not do anything but collapse on his knees before the sovereign. From a Nietzschean viewpoint, English philosophy henceforth tended towards a pessimism clothed in an optimism. While not yet in full bloom, the seed of *ressentiment* planted by Bacon began to sprout in seventeenth-century rationalism. With Hobbes, the redeeming rhetorical dimension and the elegant aphorisms fell away, and language's refusal to yield to full transparency is now a proper nuisance. So is much of the rest of human existence. Hobbes was the first thinker to bring political theory into an intimate relation with a thoroughly modern system of thought. This system had to be broad enough to account for scientific principles, all the facts of nature, including human behaviour in its social as well as its individual facets.

Hobbes was not, as John Locke had been, for example, trained in any specific field of science, but he was able to provide the ultimate conclusions to which this new science tended. In Galileo's view, the new discoveries made 'a new science out of an old subject', namely motion. The new science implied the revolutionary idea that the physical world was a purely mechanical system in which all that happens may be explained with geometrical precision by the displacement of bodies relative to one another. Broadly put, materialism is the general theory that the ultimate constituents of reality are material or physical bodies, elements or processes. It is a form of monism in that it holds that everything in existence is reducible to what is material or physical in nature. It is opposed to dualistic theories that claim that body and mind are distinct, and the direct antithesis to a philosophical idealism that denies the existence of matter. It is hostile to abstract objects, such as Platonic Ideas, if these are viewed as more than just a manner of

speaking. An implication of materialism is that the diverse qualitative experiences we have are ultimately reducible to quantitative changes in objects or in our physiological functioning. All the properties of things, including persons, are reducible to properties of matter. Although the terms referring to psychic states such as intention, belief, desire and consciousness itself have a different sense and use than terms referring to material events, a consistent materialist would deny that mentalistic terms have reference to anything other than physical events or physiological changes in our brains. The enormous advances in the sciences have contributed storehouses of empirical data that are often used to support materialism. Many philosophers have been attracted to materialism both because of its reductive simplicity and its association with scientific knowledge. Years before Newton's theory of planetary motion, Hobbes already held that every event is a motion and all kinds of natural processes can be explained by analysing complex appearances into the underlying motions of which they consist. One should start with the simplest motions, such as changes of location, and then go on to more complex cases, cases which may at first not even seem to be born out of motion, yet can in the end be traced to this simple beginning. Hobbes conceived of a philosophical system consisting of three parts. The first would deal with 'body and motion', and consist of what we today call physics and geometry, then the physiology and psychology of the human being, and then the artificial 'body' called the State. Politics and psychology would thus be assimilated into the 'exact sciences'. All possible knowledge is of a piece, and the exact pattern would be found in mechanics.

To a certain extent, it is possible to argue that Hobbes' philosophy is a radicalization of what Nietzsche saw as the worst in Francis Bacon's thought: the need for foundationalist metaphysics, an unsophisticated, atomistic science and an insistence upon reading absolute laws into all aspects of nature. Thomas Hobbes was a materialist to the bitter end.

Contrary to popular belief, however, Nietzsche would not immediately have had a problem with this, as there is an undeniable materialist element in his work. It is very hard to find a position that is not represented or dealt with in some form in Nietzsche's complex oeuvre. To think with Nietzsche is to think about everything: it is no accident that there are important correlations between Nietzsche's *Übermensch* and the notion of a Renaissance man. Dancers are notorious for not allowing themselves to be pinned down, and Nietzsche is by many of his own description a philosophical dancer, and it is one of the first images used to describe Zarathustra: 'Yea, I recognise Zarathustra. Pure is his eye, and no loathing lurketh about his mouth. Goeth he not along like a dancer?' (Z, Preface 2). With Hobbes,

just as like the case with Bacon, Nietzsche shares a healthy Ochamian contempt for idle metaphysical speculations and useless abstracta. In *WP* 710, Nietzsche throws down an interesting scientific gauntlet to his nihilistic contemporaries. At the first reading, it may seem perfectly compatible with a Hobbesian mechanistic philosophy:

Our knowledge has become scientific to the extent that it is able to employ number and measurement. The attempt should be made to see whether a scientific order of values could be constructed simply on a numerical and quantitative scale of force. All other 'values' are prejudices, naïvetés, and misunderstandings. They are everywhere *reducible* to this numerical and quantitative scale. (*WP* 710)

However, mere quantity alone can be a deceptive determinant of value. He also writes: 'Mechanistic interpretation desires nothing but quantities, but force is to be found in quality.' As paradoxically as it may sound, mechanistic descriptions do not tell us anything about the world: 'Mechanistic theory can therefore only describe processes, not explain them' (*WP* 660). Numbers can be very useful in *representing* power – in *WP* 710 Nietzsche continues by suggesting a measurable scale of force so that '[t]he ascent on this scale represents every rise in value; the descent on this scale represents diminution in value', and although Nietzsche idly speculates on whether an intense manifestation of power cannot be expressed numerically, he concludes that this would be misleading: '[I]n a purely quantitative world everything would be dead, stiff, motionless –. The deduction of all qualities to quantities is nonsense' (*WP* 564). Expressions in quantities belong to the world of representation, and faithful representation is a utopian illusion, but nevertheless an illusion strong enough to serve as the foundational principle behind Locke and all the contract theoreticians to follow in his wake. However, no matter the language employed in trying to get to the 'real' world 'it has always been the apparent world *once again*' (*WP* 566). In order to dispel any possibility of confusion on this matter, Nietzsche writes in section 565 of *WP* that

Qualities are insurmountable barriers for us; we cannot help feeling that mere quantitative differences are something fundamentally distinct from quantity, namely that they are *qualities* which can no longer be reduced to one another. But everything for which the word 'knowledge' makes any sense refers to the domain of reckoning, weighing, measuring, to the domain of quantity; while on the other hand, all our sensations of value

(i.e. simply our sensations) adhere to qualities, i.e. to our perspective 'truths' which belong to us and can by no means be 'known'. (WP 565)

Sarah Kofman's insightful analysis of Nietzsche's strategic use of metaphor reveals that, for all its appearance of strength, the edifice of the Western paradigm of knowledge, constructed with such mathematical rigor, is in fact fragile, and revealed as a congealed metaphor born from a single perspective, that has risen to gargantuan proportions. If the dice in what Nietzsche calls 'the conceptual crap game' (*Würfelspiels der Begriffe* – *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* (OTL) 1) had fallen but differently, the world would have looked very different. What is important, is not the 'correctness' of but the celebration of man as a 'mighty constructor'.

Just as the Romans and Etruscans cut up the heavens with rigid mathematical lines and confined a god within each of the spaces thereby delimited, as within a *templum*, so every people has a similarly mathematically divided conceptual heaven above themselves and henceforth thinks that truth demands that each conceptual god be sought only within *his own* sphere. Here one may certainly admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water. Of course, in order to be supported by such a foundation, his construction must be like one constructed of spiders' webs: delicate enough to be carried along by the waves, strong enough not to be blown apart by every wind. As a genius of construction man raises himself far above the bee in the following way: whereas the bee builds with wax that he gathers from nature, man builds with the far more delicate conceptual material which he first has to manufacture from himself. In this he is greatly to be admired, but not on account of his drive for truth or for pure knowledge of things. (OTL 1)

Hobbes seems to suffer from a metaphysical amnesia that holds that the world can be known and that the knowing subject plays no constitutive role in the determination of its character whatsoever. Against this, Nietzsche contends that 'Philosophizing is a kind of atavism of the highest order' in which philosophers' thinking is 'less a discovering than a re-cognising, recollecting, a return and homecoming' (BGE 20).

Nietzsche's so-called positivistic period is a misnomer; it is in reality a plea for *honesty*. He should be taken at his word when he states that science should stick to what it can *observe*: no one has ever observed the ideals

or principles indispensable to the scientific edifice. As we shall see in Chapter 4, to derive values from science, violates the essential distinction between an *is* and an *ought*. Science is a powerful helpmeet, but no legislator. After all, one should look at ‘science in the perspective of the artist, but at art in that of life’ (*BT* 2). One should thus not even look at *science* from a scientific perspective.

Science is flourishing today and its good conscience shines in its face, while that to which the whole of modern philosophy has gradually sunk, this remnant of philosophy, arouses distrust and displeasure when it does not arouse mockery and pity. Philosophy reduced to ‘theory of knowledge’, actually no more than a timid epochism and abstinence doctrine: a philosophy that does not even get over the threshold and painfully denies itself the right of entry – that is philosophy at its last gasp, an end, an agony, something that arouses pity. How could such a philosophy rule! (*BGE*, ‘We Scholars’, 6)

A further important difference between Hobbes and Nietzsche is the latter’s contention that matter is no less mysterious for being empirically verifiable than the immaterial phantasms that continue to haunt Western philosophy. Hobbes, in a typically English fashion, assumes that scientific answers come easily, as long as you ask the right questions. Do that, and Nature will provide. At least for the Englishman. Not that it has not aided the development of science.

Owing to three errors. During the last centuries science has been promoted, partly because it was by means of science that one hoped to understand God’s wisdom and goodness best – this was the main motive of the great Englishmen (like Newton); partly because one believed in the absolute utility of knowledge, and especially in the most intimate association of morality, knowledge and happiness – this was the main motive of the great Frenchmen like Voltaire; partly because one thought that in science one possessed and loved something unselfish, harmless, self-sufficient, and truly innocent, in which man’s evil impulses had no role whatsoever. (*GS* 37)

The only problem is that formulating these questions are fraught with difficulty, and even if one succeeds in getting the formulation right, Nature – being a woman – can be devilishly deceptive, even if she does consent to a philosophical interview. Hobbes famously asked his questions in geometrical

terms, equating scientific method with philosophy. E. A. Burt goes as far as to say that Hobbes's philosophy represents the first attempt to apply the assumptions and method of Galileo universally.

Nietzsche's thought is a perpetual challenge to those who tend to simplify the world, who operate under the illusion that they make the world more accessible by establishing simple dichotomies such as good and evil, spirit and body or, epistemologically speaking, mind and body, truth and error. The announcement that everything is will to power suggests the radically contingent and contextual nature of all conceptual distinctions and throws immediate suspicion on any unexamined dichotomy.

This is cause for celebration; the world is at once neither entirely within the reach of the knowing subject, nor entirely beyond its grasp. It is just enigmatic enough to be stimulating:

Not riddle enough to scare human love from it, not solution enough to put to sleep human wisdom – a humanly good thing was the world to me today, of which such bad things are said. (Z, 'The Three Evil Things')

Against the tendency to read the world in simple metaphysical categories, such as the material and the ideal, Nietzsche posits a polyvalent monist force that distinguishes not only between quantities, but also degrees and kinds of power. Difference is not limited to difference in quantity; there are qualitative differences that cannot be readily measured that are far more powerful and more meaningful. It is indeed a weak eye that measures by number alone. Hobbes is a manifestation of the will to power at its most encyclopedic; for him, knowing the world consists simply in *collecting*. A preoccupation with strength in numbers can be a form of over-compensation for the experience of qualitative weakness, and this indeed reflected in Nietzsche's account of the origins of what he famously termed *slave morality*. Consider, for example, WP 858: 'What determines your rank is the quantum of power that you are: the rest is cowardice.'

The best way of avoiding the pitfall of defining the mercurial will to power in terms of a determined concept, is to describe it as *interpretation in action*. When Nietzsche describes the will to power with respect to human beings, the term often operates as a metaphor for the act of interpretation.

The will to power *interprets* (it is a question of interpretation when an organ is constructed): it defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power. Mere variation of power could not feel themselves to be such: there must be present something that wants to grow and interprets the

value of whatever wants to grow. In fact, interpretation is itself a means of becoming master of something. (WP 643)

The will to power is neither essence, structure, *telos* nor meaning in itself, but rather at once the full force of appearance, the continual sublimation of every *telos* and the transgression of all ends. What distinguishes Nietzsche's will to power from Hobbes' static atomistic framework is the former's commitment to *movability*. The post-Heideggerian debate as to the ontological status of the will to power has very little value in itself: what matters is not whether the will to power can be known *a priori* or not, but whether it constitutes a *potent* or an *impotent* metaphysics. Paul Patton points out that the Nietzschean conception of power can be distinguished from Hobbesian grounds in a very important way. 'For Nietzsche the fundamental principle is not the goal but the process, not the momentary stasis attained by the satisfaction of need and desire, but the expenditure of energy itself' (Patton 1993: 152). It is the process of searching out and enjoying power that is important for Nietzsche, not the momentary stasis that gives one a reprieve from it. As we shall see in Chapter 5, this is why he constantly warns against superfluous teleological concepts like the will to self-preservation. This is an important difference that reflects the further fundamental gap between positive and negative conceptions of freedom. In a positive conception of freedom, power is something to strive for, not to flee from.

In his remarkable interpretation of the will to power, Gilles Deleuze reads Nietzsche as contrasting two forms of the will to power. The familiar valuational hierarchies of his (Nietzsche's) age are seen by Deleuze as *reactive* and the new conception of the will to power as effective force Deleuze names *active*. While active forces are not identical to an identifiable master-class, and slave similarly not identical to the concept *reactive*, it can be argued that Nietzsche and Deleuze simply use two different sets of metaphor to denote qualitative differences in evaluation criteria. Whereas active forces are concerned only with their own well-being and expansion, reactive forces by contrast are concerned with the active forces and find their principle of action outside themselves. Deleuze states in his reading of Nietzsche:

Even by getting together, reactive forces do not form a greater force, one that would be active. They proceed in an entirely different way, they decompose, they *separate active force from what it can do*; they take away a part or almost all of its power. In this way reactive forces do not become

active, but on the contrary, they make active forces join them and become reactive in a new sense ... when reactive forces separate it from what it can do. (Deleuze 1983: 61)

Reactive forces are not weaker than active ones; in fact they tend to overpower active ones and turn them into reactive ones, but they are slavish in that they are directed towards the active forces, incapable of legislating meaning on their own. They are rather like the thin cows of Joseph's dream: despite consuming the stronger values, they remain weak themselves. For convenience's sake we will quote Deleuze's neat list:

Reactive force is

1. a utilitarian force of adaptation and partial limitation;
2. a force which separates active forces from what they can do;
3. a force that *denies* active forces.

Active force is

1. plastic, dominant and subjugating;
2. a force which goes to the limit of what it can do;
3. a force which affirms its difference, which makes its difference an object of enjoyment and affirmation. Forces are only absolutely and completely determined if these three pairs of characteristics are taken into account simultaneously. (My emphasis, Deleuze 1983: 23)

Nietzsche sees philosophy as taking epistemology as its grounding discipline for far too long. As praiseworthy as it may be to enquire after the existence of the *synthetic a priori*, for example, the philosopher would do greater justice to his status as *evaluator* rather than mere enquirer, by asking instead of '[h]ow are *synthetic a priori* judgements possible, another question, namely why is belief in such judgements *necessary*?' (BGE 11). In other words, what does it say about the enquirer when he or she asks *this* particular question and not another? Contrary to both philosophical and popular belief, the mere hunt for the 'truth' is not automatically empowering or liberating. Given the plasticity and mobility of active forces and given that these forces are not governed by or directed towards preordained objects, the world itself must be seen as a pliable and potentially infinitely diverse field of energies, whose capacities and advances can never be fully predicted. It takes a certain kind of human to face up to this condition, in

particular, a human who can reconcile himself to the ultimately *tragic* condition that is human existence.

What makes a thinker like Hobbes so ‘unphilosophical’ (BGE 252) in his view, is the failure to face up to the full implications of what materialism implied – and to take advantage of it. This is where that unique English pessimism comes in. For all its faith in man’s ability to *understand* nature, to render the world knowable and for all its pride in achieving just this, the English philosopher is secretly, embarrassingly, *terrified* of what he finds. It is not the sleep of reason that produces monsters, reason herself finds her own monsters soon enough. The rationalist is almost like Zarathustra’s pale criminal: not equal to his deed. The worst part is that modern man has to resort to science in order to curb the monsters that have been raised by science.

Outside the lecture hall. ‘In order to prove to you that man is at bottom one of the good-natured animals, I should like to remind you how credulous he has been for such a long time. Only now has he become, very late, and after an immense self-conquest, a *mistrustful* animal. Yes, man is more evil now than ever before’.

I do not understand this: why should man be more evil and more mistrustful now? ‘Because he now has – and needs – a science’. (GS 33)

Rather than to liberate man and turn him into a genuine independent thinker, science has become an object of addiction: man has become so addicted to the light that he is now incapable of dealing with the many dark nooks and crannies of the world that still form part of both himself and the world which he inhabits.

But science provides neither authority nor foundations. Politically speaking, it is useless: it can but give *information*. Like restless atoms are the sole components of a through and through mechanical universe, so are human beings but the turbulent cogs in the social machine. In order to understand human nature, and the function of the state, a grand act of subtraction has to be committed. Hobbes writes in *De Cive*:

Everything is best understood by its constitutive causes. For as in a watch . . . the matter, figure and motion of the wheels cannot be well known, except in that it be taken insunder and viewed in parts; to make a more curious search into the rights of states and the duties of subjects, it is necessary [I say, not to take them asunder, but yet that] they be considered as if they were dissolved. (Hobbes 1939: 145)

There is a strange fallacy in English thought that runs from Francis Bacon to the recent publications of Richard Dawkins, and it is the illusion that materialism is somehow not a metaphysical theory. Dealing with what is 'real', these thinkers tend to read the term 'metaphysics' in the most literal Aristotelian vein possible, as that what comes *after* the physical. (Needless to say, this is also an act of violence against Aristotle.) However, in almost every scientist, there is a metaphysicist dying to come out, and it shows itself in the tendency to reduce the totality of all existence to a particular substance, namely matter. One is not less metaphysical for being a materialist.

According to Nietzsche, the ideal vision of natural laws is rooted in the nihilistic desire of modern man to reduce everything to a common denominator. This is why science flourishes in democratic societies: it is an expression of modern man's nihilistic democratic interests in the field of nature.

Nature's conformity to law, of which you physicists speak so proudly – as though it exists only through your interpretation and bad philology – it is not a fact, it is not a 'text' but rather only a naïve humanitarian adjustment and distortion of meaning according to which you go more than halfway to meet the democratic instincts of the modern soul. Everywhere equality before the law – nature is in this matter no different from and no better off than we are. (*BGE* 22)

For Nietzsche, this is no simple expression of the undeniable order of things, but a product of democratic views that are the trademarks of nihilistic modernism.

Nihilism has its roots in a collective refusal to *live in the world*. The changeable, mercurial and tragic world is persistently measured by a transcendent standard. While the world changes, the standard remains the same, eventually failing to provide a stable focus point or horizon within which man can live and love.

The metaphysical nihilism of the nineteenth century had a long ancestry, and it is often forgotten that Nietzsche does not automatically associate it with the birth of slave morality. Quite the contrary: it is as unavoidable as life and death itself, and very much an aspect of the former. The bad conscience results from the demands placed upon the individual during the socialization process, especially the curbing of the 'masterly' passions, like cruelty.

Slave morality does not simply develop where the bad conscience is present, but where it begins to dictate the evaluation of life. It is clear that Hobbes is one of the first modern philosophers to formally voice his distaste of life

with his famous statement that it is 'nasty, brutish and short'. Whereas medieval thought, generally speaking, is certainly a prime example of asceticism, with modernity, it tends to turn into a full-blown case of *ressentiment*, and the accompanying inability to do philosophy. Nietzsche after all, grants the Church its 'style', but refuses to allow the plebeian Luther an inch. In a similar way, it is not the Filmers and Shaftesburys that are problematic, since this stage, the world is still strong, rich and *Zarathustrian* enough to bear resentful parasites. It is after all, the price that a rich world or individual must pay for its greatness, the presence of parasites: 'how could the loftiest soul fail to have the worst parasites?' (ZIII, 'Of Old and New Law-Tables'). In his attack upon David Strauss in the first *UM*, Nietzsche states that Darwin presented an opportunity for cleansing the world of its metaphysical fictions – it showed that the world possessed no given laws to be deciphered by the smart, but if not exactly a blank page, it presented an opportunity for inscription and legislation by the strong. And none other than Hobbes is used as an example of the strong type needed in such a situation:

here was an opportunity to exhibit native courage: here he [David Strauss] ought to have turned his back upon the 'we' and boldly derived a moral code out of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and the privileges of the strong – though such a code would, to be sure, have to originate in an intrepid mind such as Hobbes, and in a grand love of truth quite different from that which explodes only in angry outbursts against priests, miracles, and the 'world-historical humbug of the resurrection'. (*UM* I, 7)

Hobbes is quite right in identifying the war of all against all, but not in the conclusions that he drew. As Peter Berkowitz points out, Nietzsche adapts Hobbes' dismal depiction of a war of all against all 'as an ennobling regulative ideal for the soul's experiences of its heterogeneous desires and needs' (Berkowitz 1995: 164). For Nietzsche, virtues can only manifest themselves through conflict, and this conflict is often of such a nature that the weak can no longer bear the demands self-cultivation makes:

Illustrious is it to have many virtues, but a hard lot; and many a one hath gone into the wilderness and killed himself, because he was weary of being the battle and battlefield of virtues.

My brother, are war and battle evil? Necessary, however, is the evil; necessary are the envy and the distrust and the back-biting among the virtues. (ZI, 'Of Joys and Passions')

In Thomas Hobbes, the phenomenon that Nietzsche identifies as the bad conscience first expresses itself philosophically. The bad conscience is inevitable; it expressed itself as soon as man became a communal creature, which is to say that it is much older than the earliest form of philosophy. According to this morality, there is somehow something wrong with the world; somewhere along the line there should be a better explanation for the pain, struggle and blatant injustice that characterizes life in the human world.

Hobbes' morality had its origins in fear. Retreat from the world in a stable order. However, that amounts not to the end of conflict or even its temporary suspension, but a shift in the style of war. The sheer complexity of the world will not break a static hierarchical order, especially one founded for pragmatic purposes.

Ascetic ideals in general posit a domain of high value, towards which humanity should strive, that is in conflict with the current domain or value system which is less highly regarded, and must therefore be suppressed, transcended or even destroyed. This polarity of superior and inferior value domains determines to a great extent conceptions of the functions, priorities and aims of the living, especially definitions of suffering. According to this way of thinking, a 'meaningful' life is one dominated by the idea that a worthwhile life consists of striving towards attaining unity with the 'higher' domain, and by implication, taking a stand against the 'lower' domain. The ascetic ideal is no mere ordinary hierarchy of values; it sets the terms according to which all other values are determined – ethical, aesthetic, political, religious and so on – and is therefore the 'foundational' framework for all other values. In ascetic thinking, the 'lower' domain is not simply to be ignored, but is to be overcome or repudiated if the higher domain is to be attained at all. Here man adopts 'the pose of man against world, of man as a world-negating principle –' (GS 346, KSA 580). In other words, the higher value is taken as an ideal *extrinsic* to life, which means that temporality and contingency are automatically devalued. Values structured by the ascetic ideal therefore tend towards *ressentiment*, and justice understood as an underlying order of fairness beyond the contingencies of life is a prime example.

For Nietzsche, asceticism tends to be an *aspect* of the life of the great, the fruitful and the inventive: 'as the most appropriate and most natural conditions of their best existence, their most beautiful fecundity' (GM III, 8, KSA 5.352) and not its ultimate aim. This is especially true of philosophical asceticism. Intellectual energy cannot be expanded sensually, and the philosopher prefers intellectual expenditure for selfish rather than

moral reasons. This is not a problem as long as the ascetic ideal remains restricted to the intellectual class. Ascetic ideals should under no circumstances become moral or transcendental. When this happens, man turns against life and creates untenable ideals, static, eternal ideals completely at odds with the world of becoming. Although decadent, ascetic ideals can be very strong: 'the ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerate life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence' (*GM III*, 13). This is the priest's morality, not the philosopher's. Nobody puts it better than Nietzsche himself:

The whole pose of 'man against world', of man as a 'world-negating principle', or of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting – the monstrous insipidity of this pose has finally come home to us and we are sick of it. We laugh as soon as we hear the juxtaposition 'man *and* world', separated by the sublime presumption of the little word 'and'. (*GS* 346, *KSA* 3.581)

The ascetic ideal in its most life-denying guise reflects the human will,

will to erect an ideal (that of the 'holy God') in order to be tangibly certain of his own absolute worthlessness when confronted with it. Oh this insane, sad beast man! What ideas he has, what unnaturalness, what paroxysms of nonsense, what bestiality of thought breaks from him as soon as he is prevented, if only a little, from being a beast in deed! (*GM II*, 22, *KSA* 5.332)

Here the higher valuation denotes a realm of the absolute and the timeless, and the lower valuation equals the human, the animal, the sensual, the material and other features of ordinary life. This valuation is eventually driven by

a will to nothingness, an aversion to life, a revolt against the most fundamental preconditions of life – but it is and remains a will! . . . And to repeat at the conclusion what I said at the start: man will sooner will nothingness than not will. (*GM III*, 28, *KSA* 5.412)

This form of valuation is usually driven by the priest. The issue is the low *valuation* the priest places on this life, which is outrightly opposed to a better mode of existence, to which this life is merely a means, and a means

only through its own denial. The ascetic ideal is not limited to religious ideals. In the modern age, no one makes better priests than political revolutionaries and utopians. They are the

political and social visionaries who hotly and eloquently demand the overthrow of all orders, in the belief that the proudest temple of fair humanity would then immediately rise up on its own. In these dangerous dreams, there is still the echo of Rousseau's superstition, which believes in a wondrous, innate, but, as it were, *repressed* goodness of human nature, and attributes all the blame for that repression to the institutions of culture, in society, state, and education. Unfortunately, we know from historical experience that every such overthrow once more resurrects the wildest energies, the long since buried horrors and extravagances of most distant times. An overthrow can well be a source of energy in an exhausted human race, but it can never be an organizer, architect artist, perfecter of the human character. (*HAHI*, 463, *KSA* 2.229)

It is probably the greatest misunderstanding in philosophical history that Nietzsche favoured a strong state. Much has already been said about Nietzsche's use in promoting a vibrant democratic culture and the question need not concern us here. In Nietzsche's view, it is not religion, but the state that constitutes the opium of the masses. In this case, it is not a strong economic class that fabricates and administers a drug to the disenfranchised and the disempowered, but rather a case where a mass of inferiors conquers a natural elite by fabricating a base and enervating myth that allows the multitudes to take over. A strong state is no guarantor of peace (as Marxism clearly proves) but a suppressor of vital vibrant energy and difference. The state is a cop-out; it saps energy, and squanders limited resources on anonymous masses while it should by rights direct those resources towards the cultivation of the best types that are humanly possible (A 8). Hobbes's Leviathan became Nietzsche's cold monster. Nietzsche makes it clear that he is quite prepared to sacrifice the 'too-many' to perish if they should hamper the development of the well constituted with their 'rich hearts' (ZI).

A philosopher who laughs – fails to take the world seriously – is always capable of facing it. This is precisely what Thomas Hobbes was not, and his suspicion of laughter explains a great deal about his marginalization of the elite.

The Olympian Vice. – Despite the philosopher who, as a genuine Englishman, tried to bring laughter into bad repute in all thinking minds – 'Laughing

is a bad infirmity of human nature, which every thinking mind will strive to overcome' (Hobbes), – I would even allow myself to rank philosophers according to the quality of their laughing – up to those who are capable of *golden* laughter. And supposing that Gods also philosophise, which I am strongly inclined to believe, owing to many reasons – I have no doubt that they also know how to laugh thereby in an overman-like and new fashion – and at the expense of all serious things! Gods are fond of ridicule: it seems that they cannot refrain from laughter even in holy matters. (*BGE* 9, 'What is Noble', 294)

Nietzsche develops his philosophy in direct opposition to such an ethos, making Zarathustra the first truly joyful philosopher – or at least philosophical persona – in the history of the canon. In an aphorism titled 'Playing with Life' Nietzsche describes the value of frivolity in ancient Greece: 'Simonides advised his compatriots to take life as a game; they were only too familiar with its painful seriousness...and they knew that even misery could become a source of enjoyment solely through art' (*HAH* 145). He who has not taken Simonides' advice, has not only failed to live in the fullest sense of the word; but missed the insights that would truly make him a philosopher.

Chapter 3

Locke, Life, Language

Karl Jaspers once expressed his frustration when reading Nietzsche with the exclamation that nowhere did Nietzsche express an opinion without contradicting himself somewhere else. In the case of John Locke however, Nietzsche leaves very little doubt as to his true feelings about the father of modern liberalism. '*Je méprise Locke*'. It is clear that Nietzsche did not exactly harbour feelings of generosity towards the cornerstone of modern liberal thought.

Upon reading further however, it transpires that even in this case, Nietzsche is not making a simple statement. For one, Nietzsche is not saying, but quoting – the full sentence reads:

[I]t was Locke of whom Schelling said, *understandably*, '*Je méprise Locke*', in their fight against the English-mechanistic deification of the world, Hegel and Schopenhauer were of one mind (with Goethe) – these two hostile brother geniuses in philosophy who strove apart toward opposite poles of the German spirit and in the process wrong each other as only brothers can. (*BGE* 252)

By quoting, rather than making an original statement, Nietzsche made a sly, rhetorical thrust towards the philosophical tradition that willingly sacrificed its artistic birthright for the pottage of empiricism. The decreasing interest in rhetorical thinking during the Enlightenment can be traced to a fundamental epistemological break that began in Europe from the seventeenth century onwards. Philosophy began to lose its intellectual status as the most fundamental discipline within the order of knowledge, and was replaced, in Germany, with historicist paradigms – especially from the 1800s – but in England, this replacement occurred even earlier and by the specialist discourses of the scientific disciplines, such as physics, physiology and biology, that introduced a new conception of progress and the empirical. The tension between rhetoric and philosophy in Locke's work is

a resurrection of an ancient conflict that can be traced to what Nietzsche viewed as Plato's un-Greek rejection of eloquence in favour of dialectical argument. With this comes the rejection of politics in its agonal form; as Hannah Arendt has also shown, the rise of *epistēmē* is in effect the death of *doxa*. And the exchange of the presubjective world of the public sphere for the determined world of interiorized subject inevitably leads to the sacrifice of genuine political freedom.

What is truly at stake in finding Lockean traces in Nietzsche's oeuvre is the question as to why rhetoric and trope should be so problematic. After all, Locke's political subject is nothing but the product of metaphor. Locke, however, denounces the art of rhetoric as the 'perfect cheat':

if we speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearance, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas* move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgement, and so indeed are the perfect cheat. (Locke 1975: III 10)

As the cynical postmodernist might expect, Locke then goes ahead to slander rhetoric further in gender terms: 'Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived' (Locke 1975: III 10).

Martha Nussbaum writes in this regard that 'Locke writes that the rhetorical and emotive elements of style are rather like a woman: amusing and even delightful when kept in their place, dangerous and corrupting if permitted to take control' (Nussbaum 1986: 16).

Nietzsche, too, realized this, but famously, took it in his stride:

Language and the prejudices upon which language is based very often act as obstacles in our path when we proceed to explore inner phenomena and impulses. . . . Wrath, hatred, pity, desire, recognition, joy, pain: all these are names indicating extreme conditions; the milder and the middle stages, and even more particularly the ever active lower stages, escape our attention, and yet it is they which weave the warp and woof of our character and destiny. (*D* 115)

As was the case with Hobbes and Bacon, Locke's call for a reassessment of knowledge is aimed at the scholastic obscurity that he detects in theologically inspired philosophy. Like Hobbes, he rejects rhetoric's ability to

'rouse the mind' as 'practically useless' and sided with the Royal Society's famously misleading motto of *nullius in verba* and the search for a universal language of clear and accurate terms that would allow for philosophical reasoning free from linguistic pollution. Or better still, a wordless discourse (Condillac 1967: 114). Even if he does leave room for rhetoric, it is as something extra, something external to 'true' discourse, the pretty icing on the cake of 'real' thinking. Already at the outset of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke picks up upon the Baconian understanding of language and holds that linguistic obscuration is the root cause of most philosophical misunderstanding: 'The greatest part of the Questions and Controversies that perplex Mankind depend on the doubtful and uncertain use of Words, or which is the same, indetermined Ideas, which they are made to stand for' (Locke 1975: 13).

There is, however, a John Locke that at times sounds almost like Nietzsche, a topological Locke whose subtle ideas are more forcefully restated in Nietzsche. In more eloquent language, of course. This is a Locke that had to be repressed so that empiricism could live. As the Foucauldian would be able to confirm, this was no innocent epistemological move, but a deliberate power strategy: with the successes of the natural sciences, it no longer paid as well to invest in rhetoric. Today, however, Nietzsche's influence has been so pervasive, so all-encompassing, that contemporary interpreters of canonical figures tend to present them as having *really* been post-modern figures *avant la lettre*. It is today almost as hard to find genuine transcendental and foundational thinkers in the history of philosophy as it was to find Nazis in Germany after the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945. After Nietzsche, everyone is *embarrassed*, and as a result, the world of criticism is today littered with ironists.¹ From a Nietzschean perspective however, there is something downright slavish about such denials: denying one's flaws is but a single step away from denying one's virtues. This is why Locke is despised: for Nietzsche, quality, strength and courage are far more important than its exactitude. Nowhere does Nietzsche denounce anyone for simply not getting his facts correct. On the contrary: 'The falseness of a judgment is for us not necessarily an objection to a judgment; in this respect our new language may sound strangest. The question is to what extent it is life-promoting, life-serving, species-preserving, perhaps even species-cultivating' (*BGE* 4). Consider too, for example, the almost complete absence of a denouncement of scholasticism in particular, on Nietzsche's 'hit list': Christianity itself is of course well presented, but either in its totality, or else in its *modern* form, as the case of Luther proves. What matters is not the correctness of proposition, but its *potency*. What

makes Locke so contemptible in Nietzsche's view, is that he extolled the least important aspects of human existence, namely what we all have in common, and turned it into a doctrine. He continued Bacon and Hobbes's attempts to be the final legislators, the law-makers that would end the human capacity for law-making altogether.

Although Locke, even after the postmodern revolution, remains very much the liberal and metaphysician that he always was, there *is* a suppressed Other to the familiar thinker of the *tabula rasa* and the Social Contract that makes an appearance in Nietzsche. It is unclear whether Nietzsche specifically studied any Locke beyond his undergraduate years, but he goes so far as to say in *WP*, section 101 that Germany had to be prepared for the scientific clarity of thinkers like Locke and Hume; for the heavy-handed metaphysical tradition they were too 'superficial'. In the context of lamenting the belatedness of the German philosophical tradition in general, Nietzsche praises the brightness, scepticism and Voltairean clarity that Nietzsche took as representing the best of eighteenth-century Western thinking. In the *UMII*, 9, chastising the Germans, he writes that 'A worthy Englishman finds them lacking in delicacy and perception'. However, it was the implicit rhetorical critique of calcified metaphysical concepts that inspired Nietzsche's positive appraisal of the British empiricists. Central metaphysical concepts, such as substance, cause and subject, simply vanish in the face of empiricist critique, where such concepts are construed as 'ideas'. Nevertheless, the empiricist tradition is at a loss to explain why the mind mistakenly assumes that it possesses such concepts, and after a strong ideational annihilation, empiricism tends to slip into a psychological dead-end, merely lamenting the limitations of the 'mind'. After a while, the empiricist tradition simply stopped thinking. For Locke, sounding suspiciously like Nietzsche, the insistence upon an underlying substratum is an example of the inability to use the mind well:

not imagining how these simple Ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves to suppose some Substratum; the Idea to which we give the name. Substance is nothing but the supposed, but unknown support of those Qualities, we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re sustante* . . . [B]ecause we cannot conceive how these qualities can subsist alone, we conceive of them existing in, and supported by, some common subject. (Locke 1975: 196)

For Locke, the mind's ability to exceed what is implanted upon it by the senses is an impediment to knowledge: Locke envisages the ideal operation

of the rational mind in strictly passive terms. Out of its weaknesses, habits, incapacities and chance, the mind ascribes characteristics to itself and to the world it, in fact, does not possess. Nietzsche likewise acknowledges the violence done to the world, for example, in the act of nomenclature, but it is not an obstacle to truth, but a precondition for it. The act of naming is articulated by *limits*, not substances. Although he is sometimes inclined to describe the constitution of concepts in terms of a physiological necessity, in *The Book of the Philosopher* (BP) he describes it as a mode of artistic creation:

There is a force in us, which allows the *main traits* of the reflected image to be perceived with more intensity and a force which emphasizes the same rhythm over the actual imprecision. This must be an artistic force, because it *creates*. Its principle means is to overlook, to omit, to ignore, hence, anti-scientific, for it does not have the same regard for all that is observed. (BP 70–72)

English philosophy's greatest tragedy is not that it lacked Nietzsche's fundamental insight as to man's freedom in creating his world, rather than to be mere students of it, but that they were once in full possession of these insights. Not only have they failed to act upon them, but they positively saw them as a burden to be liberated from as soon as possible. For Nietzsche by contrast, it is the inartistic life that is hardly worth living. He was indeed the one figure in the history of philosophy that harboured no illusions as to our ability to escape our entanglement in language. 'The intellect unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation' (HAH 6). Truth, whatever it may ultimately be, refuses to yield to the prosaic advances of the ideal language. Truth manifests itself only in game-playing, cycles of concealment and exposure and demands persuasion, passion and style. As a result, rhetoric is by no means a hindrance to the pursuit of truth, if anything, it is the only way in which she can be apprehended. Like Molière's bourgeois gentleman, who discovers that he has been speaking prose for 40 years without realizing it, we human beings are artists despite our most earnest efforts to be truth-tellers. As we shall see below, any effort to escape from our metaphysical prisons into the clear transparency of unhindered truth will be thwarted by our very embodied and linguistic existence. Artists are the only ones who at least appear to be honest about these matters:

Artists have here perhaps a finer intuition; they who know only too well that precisely when they no longer do anything 'arbitrarily', and

everything of necessity, their feeling of freedom, of subtlety, of power, of creatively fixing, disposing, and shaping, reaches its climax – in short, that necessity and ‘freedom of will’ are then the same thing with them. (BGE 213)

Empiricists in particular are but artists in denial of their status. The rise of empiricism signifies the replacement of an obvious rhetorical language game with the calcified vocabulary of the modern sciences. Games are still being played, the only difference now is that the rules have become much stricter, and the gamelike character of discourse of knowledge in the West has become hidden. But even artists in denial have their particular uses: at least the Associatives – Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Hartley – have dealt with the Rationalist delusions of the Platonic-Augustinian-Cartesian variety. Locke’s immediate achievement was to unseat the broadly Neoplatonic notion that the mind and world share a common divinely imposed structure, in favour of a more modest naturalistic conception of human capacities, according to which experience of the world is seen as the origin of knowledge insofar as it provides – more or less – direct access to sensible objects as a source for mental images and ideas.

Locke is famous for placing the source of knowledge in the senses. He is a ‘concept’ empiricist rather than a crude ‘knowledge’ empiricist. He is, however, not consistently empiricist, and held that our concepts are drawn from experience, not simply that all our knowledge is based upon experience. Before commencing with the attack on innate ideas proper, he prepares the metaphorical ground. For Locke, the mind is some kind of space within which objects are to be had and observed, as a piece of furniture is to be owned and perceived in a room. Having defined ‘Idea’ as that ‘which is the Object of Understanding when a Man thinks’, he proposes to find the solution as to how ideas enter the mind. For the innatists, the question is simply never a problem, since the mind is not conceived as some kind of room into which ideas enter, but as a substance upon which ideas are written, stamped or engraved. Locke redescribes the innatist’s position in terms of a bipartite figurative representation of mind: the mind is now an engraved substance and an eye which sees, reads and decodes the message written there. The eye, at least, is now part of the thinking thing. He then proceeds to rebut the dogmatist argument from universal assent or assent by all who have come to the use of reason. Ideas, after all, are what exists before the mind in thought, and propositions are ideas in relation. For Locke, to take either knowledge or ideas to be innately imprinted upon the mind in a merely dispositional sense – and they are clearly not even

actual from birth – would be contrary to any intelligible notion of ‘being in the mind’. ‘Whatever idea was never perceived by the mind, was never in the mind’ (Locke 1975: 116). Locke conceded dispositional knowledge and ideas, retained by memory, and capable of being revived, but he understands both intentionality and knowledge in terms of perception, and finds nonsensical the notion of perception which has never been conscious and actual. This strongly intuitionist model rules out innatism as an intelligible possibility. Book II of the *Essay* is devoted to establishing that all our ideas are derived from experience, that is, the way in which we conceive of the world (and ourselves) is ultimately determined by the way in which we experience the world (and ourselves). ‘Experience’ in this context includes not only ‘sense’, but also reflexive awareness of our own mental operations. For Descartes, the innateness of such ideas as ‘substance’, ‘thought’ and even ‘God’ consists in the potentiality of the mind’s reflecting on itself, and human reason is only accidentally involved with the senses. What is truly revolutionary in Locke’s thought is that, for the first time in modern philosophy, there are no purely intellectual ideas. Man is no more just a brain in a vat; he has come to his senses, or at least come to acknowledge them. The task traditionally assigned to intellect, namely universal thought, Locke now assigns to ‘abstraction’, or the basic classification of ‘ideas’. There are ideas of ‘sensations’ derived from our outer senses, and ideas of reflection, which are those ideas of which we become aware through introspection, for example, thinking, believing and willing. Ideas in the Lockean sense can refer to a variety of antecedents. Like Descartes, he uses it both for representative states or acts of the mind, and frequently for the represented objects in the mind, the so-called immediate objects of perception and mind. There is however, also a more classical sense of sensations as signs of their unknown causes in the motion of atoms or ‘corpuscles’ – a sense that Locke employed to point away from the Cartesian and scholastic presumption of intrinsically representative elements in thought, towards a purely causal understanding of representation, treating ideas as blank sensory effects in the mind. Book II also confronts the indeterminacy of language in its distinction between simple and complex ideas. The former, directly experienced through the senses, have no other ideas contained within them, and are qualities like red, cold and sweet. Like atoms, they can neither be created, nor destroyed. Complex ideas are compounded out of simple ideas, and the mind is capable of imagining complex arrangements of simple ideas that have no counterpart in the real world, such as a unicorn. Although he admits – again with a faint Nietzschean flavour – that ‘the free usage of ordinary language’ is constrained by various pragmatic

considerations and linguistic conventions, he makes it clear throughout Book III of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that the conglomeration of the properties of an object is not entirely haphazard or arbitrary nor entirely dependent upon authority, but on *observation*: 'the mind combines those ideas it observes to constantly go together' (Locke 1975: 116). However, even at the stage of simple ideas, Locke already runs into Nietzschean problems. He explicitly refers to sensory experiences such as sights, smells and sounds as the products of a clear and direct form of perception. Such simple ideas represent an unmediated access to reality, and to external objects to be precise. One such example might be 'the smell of a Rose' (Locke 1975: 119). However, as Walker (1994: 169) points out, given the complexity of the botanical world, it may not be that easy to distinguish the smell of a rose specifically from other flowers. Simple ideas thus tend to be vague and dependent upon specific circumstances, an idea that Nietzsche developed to a more sophisticated level in his notion of perspectivism. Furthermore, already at this level the problem of metaphoricality asserts itself. In order to distinguish the smell of a rose at all, one needs a complex referential framework for purposes of differentiation. The smell of a rose only makes sense because it *differs* from the smell of cut grass, lemons or manure. *Difference* is already present at the olfactory level. Thus, any attempt to determine simple ideas proves that simple ideas are never truly simple or determined. Humans survive only through illusions: 'Their senses nowhere lead to truth; on the contrary, they are content to receive stimuli and, as it were, to engage in a groping game on the backs of things' (OTL 1). Smells, colours, sounds, and all other impressions are strictly speaking signs and therefore require interpretation.

Despite the persistent attacks on Descartes, that which Locke shares with him is perhaps more significant from a Nietzschean point of view than their technical differences. For one, they both hoped to provide a neutral, universal account of knowledge, although they located its fundamental basis in different places. Regardless of Locke's sensitivity towards the limitations of the empirical sciences – they can never hope for the absolute degree of certainty to be found in the mathematical sciences – Locke still treated the 'senses' as a kind of universal 'organ' implying that the experience of at least the 'simple' ideas must be accompanied by a universal similitude. Locke proposed not only the mind as a *tabula rasa*, but strictly speaking, a uniformity of sense experience which would mean that the senses played no role in the construction of simple experiences – in other words, *sensa rasa*, or 'clean senses'. Locke regarded the question of identity as first and foremost an epistemological question. To *know* is a foundational activity,

the human being's first and foremost *raison d'être* is to establish a condition of certainty about the world in which he finds himself. To admit to the fundamental differences in sense experience would amount to a crisis of early subjectivity. Thus, if the role of the body had to be admitted to link man to the world again, it could only have been in a highly rudimentary, constricted fashion. If the greatest scandal in philosophy is the failed attempt to *prove* the existence of the outside world, then the fact that Locke, who appeared to have such a firm grip on the body – as empiricists and proud extollers of common sense the English were more 'sensual' than the Germans (*BGE* 252) – allowed the body to slip from his fingers, is a close second.

In one respect at least, Locke is quite right: ideas *are* first in our perceptions. But it does not end there: Locke's final conclusions simply elucidated the first stage in our complex relationship with the world. Reflection does not set in so long after sensation as Locke claims: 'It is pretty late, before most Children get Ideas of the Operations of their own Minds' (Locke 1975: 117). Experience and thought, though, is not a step-by-step experience, nor do they preclude each other, but imply each other: the body begins to think before the mind does. And it proves Nietzsche's point that the primary purpose, not only of thinking, but of human existence as such, is not to know, but to evaluate, to judge and to measure. As much as man's mind tried for a neutral rationalism, his body made him into an artist. Sense perception is not neutral, but evaluative:

Our perceptions, as we understand them: i. e., the sum of all those perceptions the becoming-conscious of which was useful and essential to us and to the entire organic process – therefore not all perceptions in general (e. g., not the electric); this means: we have senses for only a selection of perceptions – those with which we have to concern ourselves in order to preserve ourselves. Consciousness is present only to the extent that consciousness is useful. It cannot be doubted that all sense perceptions are permeated with value judgments (useful and harmful – consequently, pleasant or unpleasant). Each individual colour is also for us an expression of value (although we seldom admit it, or do so only after a protracted impression of exclusively the same colour; e. g., a prisoner in prison, or a lunatic). Thus insects also react differently to different colours: some like this colour, some that; e. g., ants. (*WP* 505, *NL* 1885–1886)

Empiricism is not truly a theory of the outside world; it is merely a prison of language that employs other guards. Decidedly better guards, if the

persistence of the doctrine of realism is anything to go by. It has achieved what even Bentham's Panopticon never could: it created a prison whose ultimate nature goes completely undetected by those who work and live within its walls.

My eyes, however weak or strong they may be, can only see a certain distance, and it is within the space encompassed by this distance that I live and move, the line of this horizon constitutes my immediate fate, in great things and small, from which I cannot escape. Around every being there is described a similar concentric circle, which has a mid-point and is peculiar to him. Our ears enclose us within a comparable circle and so does our sense of touch. Now it is by these horizons within which each of us encloses his senses as if behind prison walls, that we *measure* the world, we say this is near and this is far, this is big and this is soft: this measuring we call sensation – and it is all of it an error! According to the average quantity of experiences and excitations possible to us at any particular point in time one measures one's life as being short or long, poor or rich, full or empty: And according to the average human life one measures that of all other creatures – all of it an error! If our eyes were a hundred-fold sharper, man would appear to us tremendously tall; it is possible indeed, to imagine organs by virtue of which he would be felt as immeasurable. On the other hand, organs could be so constituted that whole solar systems were viewed contracted and packed together like a single cell: and to all beings of an opposite constitution a cell of the human body could present itself, in motion, construction and harmony, as a solar system. The habits of our senses have woven us into lies and deception of sensation: these again are the basis of all our judgements and 'knowledge' – there is absolutely no escape, no back way or bypath into the *real* world! We sit within our net, we spiders, and whatever we may catch in it, we can catch nothing at all except that which allows itself to be caught in precisely *our* net. (*D* 117)

Our ideas are connected to such an extent to the medium through which they entered the mind that anything but a perspectival existence is impossible. Because our physiological and sensory capabilities restrict our apprehension of the world, we cannot but have a very limited perspective on the world. Therefore, what we experience through our senses are impressions, not objective knowledge. The German word for perception, *Wahrnehmen*, means 'taking-as-true'. Our physical existence acts as a kind of 'filter' through which perception is possible. Philosophy tends to treat this as

a problem to overcome; at least since the Enlightenment the body has become alien, a strange barrier to the pure knowledge that can be accessed through the mind. Nothing, however, undermines metaphysical dualism as effectively as genuine awareness of physical existence. In its peculiarly enigmatic fashion – Nietzsche might have called it ‘feminine’ – the body refuses to be separated from its secrets. In contrast with the standard dualist assumption that the mind directs the body, Nietzsche claims that the body creates while the soul is merely one of its products: ‘the awakened one, the knowing one, saith: “Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body”’ (Z I, ‘The Despisers of the Body’). The body does not stand alone either, but appears to be deeply intertwined with language.

It is on tropes, not unconscious reasonings that our sensory perceptions rest. Identifying like with like – discovering some similarity between one thing and another is the fundamental process. Memory lives by this activity and continually exerts itself. *Confusion* is the originary phenomenon – This presupposes the act of seeing forms. The image in the eye regulates our recognition, rhythm our sense of hearing. We would never achieve representation of time by means of the eye alone, nor a representation of space by means of the ear alone. The sense of causality corresponds to the tactile sense.

At first we see images of the eye only *in us*, we hear sound only *in us*, from there the admission to an outer world is a big step. Plants, for example, have no sense of an outer world. The tactile sense and the visual image simultaneously give two sensations side by side; because they always appear together; they awaken the representation of a connection through *metaphor* – for not all the things which appear together are connected. (BP 134)

Language and the body thus seem to be in a conspiracy against the mind in their refusal to let pure ideas enter consciousness untainted. This is why Locke’s attempt at a sanitized correspondence theory of truth ultimately fails. Even Locke himself alludes to an implicit tropological element in his work. In a passage from ‘On Perception’ which introduces the Molyneux problem, Locke writes:

We are farther to consider concerning Perception, that *Ideas that we receive in sensation*, are often in grown People *altered* by Judgements, without our taking notice of it. When we set before our Eyes a round Globe, with any

uniform Colour, e.g. Gold, Alabaster, or Jet, 'tis certain, that the *Idea* thereby imprinted on our Mind, is of a flat circle, variously shadow'd, with several degrees of Brightness and Light coming to our Eyes. But we having by use been accustomed to perceive, what kind of appearance convex Bodies are wont to make in us; what Alterations are made in the reflections of Light, by the difference of the sensible Figures of Bodies, the Judgement presently, by an habitual custom, alters the Appearances into their Causes: So that from that, which truly is a variety of shadow or colour, collecting the figure, and frames to Itself the perception of a convex Figure, and a Uniform Colour, when the Idea we receive from thence, is only a Plain variously coloured, as is evident from Painting. (Locke 1975: 145)

It is clear from this paragraph that Locke admits to that very Nietzschean – and Kantian – notion that judgement alters ideas received by the sensation, and importantly for anti-metaphysical purposes, turns appearances into causes. In Locke's example, the sensations the mind has imprinted upon it is that of 'a flat circle variously shadowed' or 'a plain variously coloured' and the idea that follows from this is of 'a convex figure of a uniform colour'.

What happens here is no longer pure sensation, but a metonymic event. Although no linguistic substitution takes place, ideas of sensation are ultimately replaced by ideas of judgement, and some sensual mutation occurs.

Locke specifically designates this process of taking and displacement as a habitual contiguity of ideas – of colour, two-dimensional shape and then a three-dimensional figure – and sees it as a causal relationship. The coloured sphere in question causes the *appearance* or idea of the coloured plain, and the idea of the sphere is the sum of physical impressions that entered the mind plus the mind's own addition of the third dimension – judgement. As William Walker points out, the substitution of ideas of sensation by ideas of judgement is thus the replacement of ideas of cause by an ideational effect (Walker 1994: 177). In rhetoric, the name of a cause, for example, a discoverer, can be substituted for the name of an effect, namely the discovery itself (e.g. joule after James Prescott Joule). In this case, the idea of a cause (the agent, Joule) takes the place of another idea (the numerical relation between heat and mechanical energy) which is an *effect* of that cause, in the Kantian sense that Joule interpreted aspects of reality according to certain categories – just as the mind interprets reality according to mental categories. This is a case of mental rhetoric: the substitution of images operates on a similar basis as linguistic tropes.

A further example of how the mind intervenes in perception is with abstract idea like infinity. Infinity cannot make its appearance through the senses, nor can the temporal mind itself truly have an idea of infinity. It is the classic problem of the sublime. For Locke, the idea of infinity is 'nothing but a supposed endless Progression of the Mind over what repeated Ideas of Space it pleases' (Locke 1975: 213). The Boylean Locke explains infinity in terms of the sum of its parts: the idea of finite lengths and the ability of the mind to replicate. This is a perfect example of synecdoche: the mind never has a complete picture of the *whole* of eternity, but pictures it by envisaging a part of it. Synecdoche is the substitution of a word used to designate the part of a thing for a word that designates the whole of that thing. As Walker emphasizes, from a deconstructive point of view, *all* mathematical concepts stand in a synecdochal relationship to the idea of infinity, as all time-related concepts represent a part of eternity (Walker 1994: 176). However, these synecdochal examples stand in a relationship with something that can never be pictured in total, as a leaf may stand for a plant, or a sail for a ship.

Locke is clearly inconsistent in deciding what the mental agent must do in order to engage in the activity of knowing. He usually claims that knowing is simply the mind's perception of the ideas and relations between them it contains, but sometimes also claims that it involves mental acts of negation and affirmation (Locke 1975: 494). Furthermore, the mind also answers for acts of separating or joining signs, and assenting and judging (Locke 1975: 591). There is however no major contradiction here, because Locke's figurative language unambiguously posits a mental *agent* that exists independently of the mental site represented as an enclosed space which interacts in a variety of ways with the mental space. Metaphors that underline this include those of possession (the mental content that the agent has when conscious), force and impact which suggest the interaction between the mental agent and its objects of knowledge. All the knowing thus gets done by the eye or person that observes, and then interacts with the received material.

The mind is indeed so active that it keeps on positing the idea of substance. Admitting to the usefulness of the 'Idea of Substance' in Book II, Locke nevertheless writes that he who chooses to examine himself on the content of substance will find that 'he has no *Idea* of it all, but only a Supposition of he knows not what support of such Qualities, which are capable of producing simple Ideas in us' (Locke 1975: 295). He continues to claim that 'we have no clear, or distinct Idea of the Thing we suppose a Support' (Locke 1975: 296), but still seems hesitant to dismiss the obscure notion of 'support' altogether.

One of the reasons why the mind keeps thinking that substance does exist, is that it is incapable of conceiving otherwise.

The Mind being, as I have declared, furnished with a great number of simple Ideas, conveyed in by the Senses, as they are found in exterior things, or by reflection upon its own Operations, takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple Ideas go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, and words being suited to common Apprehensions, and made use of for quick dispatch, are called so united in one subject, by one Name; which by inadvertency we are apt afterward to talk of and consider as one simple Idea, when indeed it is a Complication of many Ideas together; Because as I have said, not imaging how these simple Ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves, to suppose some *Substratum*, wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call *Substance*. (Locke 1975: 295)

Nietzsche would seem to agree. He too understood the metaphysical concept of substance as an unchanging substrate:

Fundamental Question of Metaphysics. When one day the history of the genesis of thought comes to be written, the following sentence by a distinguished logician will stand revealed in a new light: 'The primary universal law of the knowing subject consists in the inner necessity of recognizing every object in itself as being in its own essence something identical with itself, thus self-existent and at bottom always the same and unchanging, in short, as a substance.' (HAH 18)

But Nietzsche does not shrink from dismissing the notion of substance outright. Metaphysics a symptom of a particularly decadent view of the world. At the root of dual-world nihilism, suppose a 'real' world behind the world of appearance. For all his claims to empirical precision, Locke is yet another dualist metaphysician who resents the world as it is. Locke ropes in substance again in order to provide a solid foundation for his liberal politics. Again, it must be emphasized that *this* is the reason for Nietzsche's contemptuous dismissal of Locke: he was so busy being a philosopher that he forgot to be a *human*. There is a distinct flavour of what Sartre would call 'bad faith' or inauthenticity in Locke's politics. As was the case with his epistemology, Locke's politics is built upon the suppression of trope, and in this case upon the confusion of origin. Locke's liberal subject is a textbook

example of the substitution of cause and effect: the subject is an effect of linguistic illusion, not the cause or foundation of the state.

Like Hobbes, Locke disdains the advice that Lewis Carroll would later lay into the mouth of the Red King ('Begin at the beginning', the King said gravely, 'and go on till you come to the end, then stop') and started his account of politics and human nature somewhere in the middle with the subject of free will. To do justice to Nietzsche though, any assumption of a 'truer' beginning would make the same errors traditional metaphysics was founded upon. Nietzsche describes these errors as the

Congenital defect of philosophers. All philosophers suffer from the same defect, in that they start with present-day man and think they can arrive at their goal by analyzing him. Instinctively they let 'man' hover before them as an *aeterna veritas*, something unchanging in all turmoil, a secure measure of things. But everything the philosopher asserts about man is basically no more than a statement about man within a *very limited* time span. A lack of historical sense is the congenital defect of all philosophers. Some unwittingly even take the most recent form of man, as it developed under the imprint of certain religions or even certain political events, as the fixed form from which one must proceed. They will not understand that man has evolved, that the faculty of knowledge has also evolved, while some of them even permit themselves to spin the whole world from out of this faculty of knowledge. (HAH 2)

Locke is indeed a Colossus of modernity, but one whose twin projects of providing a concept of human understanding and political foundation undermine each other. The specificity of the experience of perception alone undermines the universality and uniformity necessary to create the subject required for a justifiable liberalism. Since mere physical perspective can generate so much difference, it is only to be expected that political differences would be even more glaring. However, no political order would ever come to pass without obliterating essential differences. The birth of liberalism was as violent as the Empire that would later be justified in its name, even if its political traces are not so obvious. To interpret is to see in a particular way, at the expense of all other possibilities of interpretation. Perspectives that do not fit are simply ignored, or as that other great resurrectionist of modernity, Freud, would concur, simply driven underground. We ourselves are the source of this interpretative injustice, or more correctly, our need for a world in which it is possible to live, is. To a certain extent, then, man is the measure of the world, but only *his* world. Man

is thus a contingent measure and our measurements do not refer to an original, underlying reality. What we call reality is the result not only of our limited perspectives upon the world, but the *interplay* of those perspectives themselves. The liberal subject is thus a result of, and not a foundation for, the experience of reality. The subject is identified as origin of meaning only through a process of differentiation and reduction, a course through which the will is designated as a psychological property.

Locke takes the existence of the subject of free will – free to exercise political choice such as rising against a tyrant, choosing representatives or deciding upon political direction – simply for granted. Furthermore, he seems to think that everyone should agree as to what the *rules* are according to which these events should happen. For him, the liberal subject underlying these choices is clearly fundamental and universal.

Locke's philosophy of individualism posits the existence of a discreet and isolated individual, with private interests and rights, independent of his linguistic or socio-historical context. C. B. MacPherson identifies a distinctly *possessive* quality to Locke's individualist ethic, notably in the way in which the individual is conceived as proprietor of his own personhood, possessing capacities such as self-reflection and free will. Freedom becomes associated with possession, which the Greeks would associate with slavery, and society conceived in terms of a collection of free and equal individuals who are related to each through their means of achieving material success – which Nietzsche, too, would associate with slave morality. Though Locke has unjustly been tainted, notably by Marxists, with holding that there are no natural rights, save the right to private property, there is no denial that he sees man as emerging from the state of nature into political subjectivity with the advent of commercial activity. Man becomes *man* by demarcating a piece of nature as his own:

Though the water running in the fountain be everyone's, yet who can doubt that in the pitcher is his only who drew it out? His labour has taken it out of the hands of nature, where it was common and belonged equally to all her children, and hath thereby appropriated it to himself. (Locke 1960: 29)

Instead of describing a public good, Locke set up a body of innate, indefeasible rights which limit the power of a community, and stand as bars to prevent interference with the liberty and property of private individuals. Thomas Jefferson held the endowment of all individuals with the equal right to life, liberty and property as axiomatic. Social and moral theorems

could be deduced from it, but the rights of the sovereign individual and the importance of his freedom was more obvious than any other ethical principle.

There is a central tenet to John Locke's thinking that, as conventional as it has become, remains a strange strategy. Like Thomas Hobbes, he justifies modern society by contrasting it with an original state of nature. For Hobbes, as we have seen, the state of nature is but a hypothesis, a conceptual tool in order to elucidate a point. For Locke, however, the state of nature is a very real historical event, although not a condition of a state of war. Man was social by nature, rational and free. Locke drew this inspiration from Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, notably from his idea that church government should be based upon human nature, and not the Bible, which, according to Hooker, told us nothing about human nature. The social contract is a means to escape from nature, friendlier though it may be on the Lockean account. For Nietzsche, however, we have never made the escape: we are still holus-bolus in it: 'being conscious is in no decisive sense the *opposite* of the instinctive – most of the philosopher's conscious thinking is secretly directed and compelled into definite channels by his instincts. Behind all logic too, and its apparent autonomy there stand evaluations' (*BGE* 3). Locke makes a singular mistake in thinking the state of nature a distant event. In fact, Nietzsche tells us, we have never left it. We now only wield more sophisticated weapons, such as the guilty conscience, as we shall see in our next chapters. H. G. Wells' opinions on the Social Contract are much closer to the mark. Writing in *Love and Mr Lewisham* he opines:

The Social Contract is nothing more or less than a vast conspiracy of human beings to lie to and humbug themselves and one another for the general Good. Lies are the mortar that binds the savage individual man into social masonry. (Wells 1963: 29)

More than 300 years after Locke, and after being subject to the Nietzschean era that followed after Walter Kaufman's rehabilitation of Nietzsche, we know that things are not this simple. If Locke were to dismiss rhetoric, he should have written off his rights-possessing subject right after it, for this subject follows from the grammar that produced it. Much happens before the subject sets himself apart from the state of nature. Grammatical concepts such as 'subject' and 'predicate' structures our thinking to an unavoidable extent, so much so that language contains a hidden philosophical mythology (*The Wanderer and His Shadow* (WS) II, ii).

Subjects, objects and predicates are in fact anthropologically necessary constructions that help us to order our world and give meaning to our experiences. By insisting upon a picture of language that gives us direct access to the world, we only fool ourselves. And a self-deceived subject is hardly a foundation for politics. Nietzsche writes:

That which separate me most thoroughly from the metaphysicians is: I do not agree to their view that it is the 'I' which thinks, rather, I take the 'I' itself to be a mental construction, which is of the same category as 'matter', 'thing', 'substance', 'individual', 'purpose', 'number', therefore as a merely regulative fiction according to which we project some kind of permanence... unto a world of becoming. The belief in grammar, in the linguistic subject, object, in verbs, has thus far, subjugated the metaphysicians. (KGWVIII, 3 [35])

For Nietzsche, language is sum of concepts, themselves but the imposition of an artistic sign upon other signs. It is quite literally born *ex nihilo*; out of the differences that separate the respective signs from each other. There is no originary presence at the birth of language, and any attempt to use it as a foundation is doomed to fail. *On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense* makes it clear: the constraints of meaning are both epistemological and phenomenological. The formally political can only begin at conceptual level, and the larger part of the history of language happens long before that.

Metaphor has no autonomy or epistemological stability in the Nietzschean context. For Nietzsche, to use metaphor means to treat something as *identical* which has been recognized as similar at one point. This 'lumping together' of dissimilar things is the definition of metaphor that appears most frequently in Nietzsche's work, but he does make use of another, that is, Aristotle's classic conception of metaphor, 'a metaphor is a carrying over of a word whose usual meaning is something else, either from the genus to the species, from the species to the genus, or from species to species or according to proportion' (Aristotle 1970: 317). Nietzsche takes this notion of a linguistic carrying-over and, finding it too limited, extends it to include any transference from one domain to another, be it literal to figurative, concrete to abstract, physical to spiritual or subject to object. He famously distinguishes three stages of metaphor:

To begin with, a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor. And

each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one. (TL 1)

From the sound, the concept is derived: third metaphor.

The process begins with the first metaphor, the transfer of stimuli from unconscious physiological processes to mental images. In this most primal stage, the process uses synecdoche, which allows for 'inexactitude of sight', the power within us that allows us to privilege certain features at the cost of others. The operation of synecdoche selects according to its own 'persuasion', according to its own relationship with things. It bars certain stimuli so as to create space for other stimuli, those that allow the individual to have a manageable perspective on the world. Thus the individual begins his own contest of power and domination. In other words, in the chaos of stimuli a space of contest is created where certain species can thrive. Deception plays an important role here, so without the ability to lead astray, language would not exist. Metaphor begins with ostracism or exclusion (Nietzsche uses words such as *übersehen*, *weglassen*, *überhören*) and is followed by activities of displacement, transposition and commutation (*umdeuten*, *übertragen*, *vertauschen*). Language only emerges as a result of an intense agonistic game. Like everything new, it has its origins in its own particular form of violence.

Language is thus the result of a series of metaphorical translations that begins with a nerve impulse and becomes an image, then a sound or word, and only then a concept. This involves transfer through four different spheres, namely the physiological, intellectual, acoustic and abstract spheres. There is no question of a 'perfect' translation between the spheres, since the transfer is at best an aesthetic relation, which is of course a relationship that is far from simple. This 'translation' is characterized by the move from passive to active. For example, light enters the eye purely passively. It allows us, however, to identify the sensation with the sense and impute causality. The result is the *active* notion of 'I saw a light', which does not really represent what happened. Out of this transposition of cause and effect are born the active subject and the object, from whom all grammatical relations follow. The first two spheres of metaphor exist as the world of pure nerve stimulation and 'vivid first impressions' (TL 1). These two spheres operate interactively; the nerve stimulation is purely physiological, but allows the sphere of images, which is psychological, to come into being. The next transformation returns to the physiological, in the creation of sound and other material signifiers that make communication possible. The final construction, the concept, is a linguistically created

metaphysical sphere, and it is in this sphere that man's capacity for artistic legislation really begins, because it is only now that he becomes vaguely aware of his capacity to create. The concept is testimony to man's capacity to generalize, to fit countless other possible cases.

For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an aesthetic relation: I mean, a suggestive transference, a stammering translation into a completely foreign tongue – for which there is required, in any case, a freely inventive intermediate sphere and mediating force. Appearance is a word that contains many temptations, which is why I avoid it as much as possible. For it is not true that the essence of things appears in the empirical world. (OTL 1)

In this 'freely intermediate sphere' the human capacity for metaphor formation functions, and in this space the interpreted world that we know is born. Our primal relationship with the world is thus aesthetic. Sarah Kofman goes as far as to associate Nietzsche's use of metaphor with his defence of an aristocratic ethos: 'Metaphoric style is 'aristocratic'; it allows people of the same kind [type] to recognize each other; it exclude members of the herd as inappropriate, foul smelling; to speak commonly is to become vulgar' (Kofman 1972: 163–164).

Truth originates when humans forget that they are 'artistically creating subjects' or products of law or stasis and begin to attach 'invincible faith' to their perceptions, thereby creating truth itself. For Nietzsche, the key to understanding the ethic of the concept, the ethic of representation, is *conviction*:

Conviction is the belief that in some point of knowledge one possesses absolute truth. Such a belief presumes, then, that absolute truths exist; likewise, that the perfect methods for arriving at them have been found; finally, that every man who has convictions makes use of these perfect methods. All three assertions prove at once that the man of convictions is not the man of scientific thinking; he stands before us still in the age of theoretical innocence, a child, however grownup he might be otherwise. But throughout thousands of years, people have lived in such child-like assumptions, and from out of them mankind's mightiest sources of power have flowed. (HAH 630)

Few convictions have proven to be as strong as the conviction of the existence of a fundamental subjectivity. For Nietzsche, it is an illusion, a bundle

of drives loosely collected under the name of 'subject' – indeed, it is nothing but these drives, willing, and actions in themselves – and it cannot appear as anything else except through the seduction of language (and the fundamental errors of reason petrified in it), which understands and misunderstands all action as conditioned by something which causes actions, by a 'Subject' (*GMI*, 13). Subjectivity is a form of linguistic reductionism, and when using language, '[w]e enter a realm of crude fetishism when we summon before consciousness the basic presuppositions of the metaphysics of language – in plain talk, the presuppositions of reason. Everywhere reason sees a doer and doing; it believes in will as the cause; it believes in the ego, in the ego as being, in the ego as substance, and it projects this faith in the ego-substance upon all things – only thereby does it first create the concept of 'thing' (*TI*, 'Reason in Philosophy', 5). As Nietzsche also states in *WP* 484, the habit of adding a doer to a deed is a Cartesian leftover that begs more questions than it solves. It is indeed nothing more than an inference according to habit: 'There is activity, every activity requires an agent, consequently – (*BGE* 17). Locke himself found the continuous existence of the self problematic, but did not go as far as Hume's dissolution of the self into a number of 'bundles'. After all, even if identity shifts occurred behind the scenes, he required a subject with enough unity to be able to enter into the Social Contract. This subject had to be something more than merely an 'eternal grammatical blunder' (*D* 120), and willing had to be understood as something simple. For Nietzsche, it is 'above all *complicated*, something that is a unit only as a word, a word in which the popular prejudice lurks, which has defeated the always inadequate caution of philosophers' (*BGE* 19).

As Foucault would later demonstrate, it is folly to take the social contract as a measure against violence, for the subject that participated in its formulation, has already been subject to linguistic, social, as well as political violence. Even a brief genealogical probe reveals that no stable concept, not even in its simplest linguistic form, is ever innocent. Behind all apparently clearly circumscribed concepts are the metaphysician's belief in the principle of identity. This belief is the reason why Michel Haar describes a 'concept' as 'a unit of meaning which comprises and contains, in an identical and total manner, the content it assumes' (Haar 1977: 7). A concept can thus be understood as a single petrified unit of meaning which is distinguishable from other such units. It is, in other words, an attempt to order our understanding of the world into easily manageable units of meaning. Not only death, but language is the great equalizer; silencing unruly differences that would otherwise render neat metaphysical constructions impossible.

Since conceptually, metaphor pre-empts contingency, Nietzsche attempts to undermine this assumption of the *solidity* of the concepts that make up our world by tracing and analysing the lines of demarcation between the apparently mutually exclusive concepts that form the traditional moral vocabulary of the West. In this way, he traces the operation of the will to power. The most important aspect of this genealogical tracing is the exposition of how a moral community establishes its boundaries by way of its mode of evaluation and differentiation. This enterprise subjects the history of conceptualization to the volatilizing effect of genealogical analysis, and disconnects such treasured metaphysical constructions as good and evil, true and untrue, just and unjust, from any fixed point or reference. From this perspective, the history of language becomes the history of the will to power. The most indispensable concepts that help to order the world are revealed as products of human desire, the more valuable because they are so. After Nietzsche these concepts simply cannot be seen as testifying to an underlying metaphysical reality that determines the ways in which we speak of it.

Note

- ^{1.} Paul de Man, especially, is inclined to read the entirety of philosophy as an exercise in rhetoric. See, for example, de Man's essay on Locke in 'The Epistemology of Metaphor' in Sachs, S. (ed.) (1979). *On Metaphor*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Chapter 4

Hume on the Use and Abuse of Scepticism for Life

Risking a great injustice to the uniqueness of Scotland's most famous philosopher, it is possible to say that Hume was Nietzsche before Nietzsche came along. That is to say, that like the arch-subversive to follow in the nineteenth century, Hume was the only thinker to stand beyond the charmed circle of metaphysicians and the mainstream tradition of epistemological optimism. Like Nietzsche, he reinvented history – albeit in a very different way – and like Nietzsche, he expressed scepticism about philosophy's most cherished beliefs. Hume acted as a kind of palate cleanser, showing that key metaphysical categories such as causality and identity are simply not tenable. Remarkably, Hume already finds the roots of these categories in psychology, although he tends more towards epistemology than to what Nietzsche – and Freud – would call 'drives'.

However, as the Nietzsche reader knows full well – Nietzsche seldom offers unqualified adoration, and although his epistemological position has a lot in common with that of Hume, he does not *end* his thinking in a position of scepticism. Hume's project is aimed at undermining the delusion of taking forms of representation of the real for reality itself, while Nietzsche's linguistic critique of metaphysics is aimed at overcoming nihilism. This is a further cardinal difference between the two subversives: for Nietzsche, to end one's thoughts with what one cannot know eventually leads to nihilism. Even Bertrand Russell admitted that 'in a certain sense, Hume represents a dead end' (Russell 1967: 637). Man does not live by denial alone.

Despite his sceptical attacks upon the possibility of knowledge, Hume remains firmly within the constraints of metaphysical discourse. His is simply a *negative* metaphysics, a metaphysics *in verso*. Scepticism is, after all, a critique of the capacities of our cognitive and intellectual capacities. Hume's scepticism, like Descartes' optimism, is born out of a desire for certainty. He writes at the conclusion of *A Treatise of Human Nature* that 'we

are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too, and make use of such terms as these, ‘tis evident, ‘tis certain, ‘tis undeniable, which a due deference to the public, ought, perhaps prevent’ (Hume 1975: 231). He then adds to this observation that his own use of these terms does not imply any less scepticism. Interestingly, this may point to his awareness of the unavoidability of metaphysical pollution and language, but also an awareness of the implications of his philosophy that he might have hesitated to explore.

Nietzsche’s knowledge of Hume’s arguments was without doubt limited. As was the case with Locke, Nietzsche’s first, and probably only, encounter with Hume was class notes from Carl Schaarschmidt’s philosophy lectures in Bonn in the summer of 1865, during which Hume’s central thesis on causality was discussed. One of the recommended texts for the course was a widely read text by Albert Schweigler, namely *Geschichte der Philosophie im Umriß*, which contained a chapter on Hume’s theory of causality. In addition, Hume’s reception in German idealism as an important precursor of Kant made him a standard figure in the history of philosophy, and Nietzsche would have been aware of his main ideas on this level at least. Sarah Kofman, for example, points out that ‘Nietzsche’s operative concepts (forgetfulness, utility, habit), are precisely those of the empiricists’ (Kofman 1972: 75).

Hume’s philosophical project tends to put asunder what metaphysics has joined together. Taking his cue from Locke, he holds that every simple idea is at least in principle an independent entity, and that it is theoretically possible that any one simple idea might either precede or follow any other simple idea in any order whatsoever. However, experience tells us that simple ideas do not generally appear in the mind in a completely random fashion. To the contrary, even in the wildest daydreams, not to mention the nature of everyday conversation or argument, our ideas, both simple and complex, tend to fall into regular patterns. Our ideas are never completely random and pure chance is seldom involved. There must then be ‘some universal principles’ at work in our mind, ‘some bond of union’ among them, some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another. The principles he regarded as governing the associations of ideas are resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect. These ‘principles’ effect an illusionary metaphysics of solidity, space, time, identity and causation. His most famous example is of course the notion of causality. His mistrust of causality stems from the suspicion that it is a misrepresentation from what is actually the case. Nietzsche would of course heartily agree, but as we shall see, he read a far greater significance in this fact than Hume ever

did. Acting within the constraints of empiricism set from Bacon onwards, Hume's contention is that since our knowledge of the world is derived from the mere succession of sense stimuli from without, all attempts to organize these stimuli into a meaningful whole imply synthetic acts, which as Kant was to demonstrate later, prove little – Nietzsche would say nothing – about the reality underlying these stimuli. Ultimately, even the most rational mind is unable to predict whether those stimuli will be the same tomorrow. A vacuum cannot serve as a foundation.

Hume is more careful than Locke in that he accepts Locke's central thesis about the direct accessibility to the senses only with respect to the so-called simple ideas. Most of our ideas are, however, complex, and based upon abstract notions of cause, effect, association and resemblance, and are not directly based upon empirical experience. His claim in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that 'all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom', is based upon a sense of distance between our picture of the world, and what might ultimately be true of it. Like the empiricists after him he takes on Locke's theory of simple and complex ideas, which he re-terms as 'impressions'. Hume defines impressions as 'sensations, passions and emotions, as they first make their appearance in the soul' (Hume 1975: 2) and 'ideas are the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning'. Alexander Rosenberg interprets ideas as 'the mental images with which we reason' and impressions as the 'immediate and unavoidable sensations or feelings that, according to Hume, cause ideas' (Rosenberg 2005: 65). Hume's central argument that every idea or concept is a copy of the impressions that cause it is based upon an inductive inference from past constant conjunctions and the temporal priority of primary impressions. Hume used this account of our gaining access to the outside world in order to demolish metaphysics. In pure empiricist spirit he states that the yardstick between sense and non-sense is a simple question as to the origin of a particular idea. If there is no immediate corresponding impression, such as we have seen is the case with an idea like substance, the idea is meaningless. He writes:

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent) we need but enquire, from what impression is that suppos'd idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. (Hume 1975: 2)

In all our thinking, everyday as well as in fields like science, philosophy, psychology, theology and morality, the concept of cause and effect plays

a foundational role. This makes it a fit subject for the devastating question as to where the *impression* of cause comes from? The answer is already clear, and it is essentially negative. A formal empiricist definition of causality led Hume to conclude that causation was basically a relation between concrete events. Causes did not occur in nature. Our experience of that nature consisted of isolated perceptions or events, or strictly speaking, isolated perceptions of events. Importantly, for Hume the difference between causal sequences and merely accidental ones, does not consist in a real metaphysical connection between individual events present in particular causal sequences, and absent in purely accidental sequences. Instead, 'causation in one sequence of events requires constant conjunction of other events of the same types'. If there is a power called causality or causation, it does not allow itself to be shown to the observing eye. In fact, 'so little does any power discover itself to the senses in the operation of matter that the Cartesians conclude that matter is devoid of all power, and that the (apparent) operations of matter are all effected by God himself'. There is nothing 'in' a fire whose analysis will yield an answer as to why it burns one's flesh. In addition, 'our own minds afford us no more notion of energy than matter does'. Only one conclusion is possible. '[E]ither we have no idea at all of force and energy, and these words are altogether insignificant, or they can mean nothing but that the determination of thought, acquir'd by habit to pass from the cause to its usual effect' (Hume 1978: 656). There is thus nothing in the objects, taken in pairs, that distinguishes causal and non-causal sequences. There is thus no rational proof of the causal principle whatsoever: 'Every demonstration that has been produced for the necessity of a cause is fallacious' (Hume 1978: 657). 'Cause' is thus a two-place predicate that takes classes of events for its terms. All that we have are constant conjunctions, or the illusion of causal necessity after seeing a particular 'cause' being followed repeatedly by a particular 'effect'. There are no necessary effects that can be observed. The alleged necessity of the causal relationship was, Hume held, in fact of psychological origin, and consisted purely as a habit of mind.

For a philosopher often accused of obscurantism, Nietzsche is perfectly clear that he is entirely in accord with Hume on the matter of causality.

There are neither causes nor effects. Linguistically, we do not know how to rid ourselves of them. (WP 551)

We have uncovered a manifold one-after-the-other where the naïve man and inquirer in older cultures saw only two separate things. 'Cause' and

‘effect’ is what one says; but we have merely perfected the image of becoming without reaching the image behind it. In every case, the series of ‘causes’ confronts us much more completely, and we infer, first that this and that has to precede in order that this or that may then follow – but this does not imply *comprehension*. In every chemical process, for example, quality appears as a ‘miracle’ as ever; also every locomotion; nobody has *explained* a push.

[. . .]

Cause and effect, such a duality probably never exists; in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces, just as we perceive motion only as isolated points and then infer it without actually ever seeing it. The suddenness with which many effects stand out misleads us; actually, it is sudden only for us. (GS 112)¹

For Nietzsche, the modern scientific model of man as the great explainer, or the great unlocker of mysteries sets him up in a game he cannot possibly win. Man does not stand in a one-to-one relationship with the world.

But how could we possibly explain anything? We operate only with things that do not exist: lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces. How should explanations be at all possible when we first turn everything into an *image*, our image! (GS 112)

Nietzsche thoroughly agrees with Hume that there is no ‘objective’ causality, but that it is the subject who makes these constant conjunctions. Importantly though, for Nietzsche, is the fact that causality is a product of *human activity*. He continues in GS 112: ‘It will do to consider science as an attempt to humanize things as faithfully as possible; as we describe things and their one-after-another, we learn to describe ourselves more and more precisely.’

By grounding causal relations in constant conjunctions, Hume has transformed the nature of philosophy of science altogether. Failing to find an impression of necessity in objects, he turned to the habit of inferring from the past in the hope of showing that beliefs in causal necessity could be demonstrated to emerge rationally from such reasoning. However, he found only that inductive conclusions are either built upon premises that warrant further induction, or imply deductive arguments that strictly speaking tell us nothing about the world, and cannot be used as a foundation for induction. Inductive reasoning gives us no indubitable facts that we can employ with absolute certitude in the future. As Nietzsche would concur, the world remains a place of uncertainty. The Duke of Wellington,

being a practical man, once described it as follows: 'All the business of war, indeed all the business of life is to endeavour to fill out what you do not know by what you do; that is what I called 'guessing what was at the other side of the hill' (Brown 1986: 112).

In a note from the *Nachlass* Nietzsche formulates his agreement with Hume somewhat differently:

Causality is made by *thinking force* into sequential processes. A certain 'understanding' emerges through this – we have anthropomorphized the process, made it 'intelligible'. . . . But the intelligible is always the customary. (Aphorism 10175, Autumn 1884–Autumn 1885, KSA 11.460)

So far Nietzsche agrees with Hume. However: 'Hume was right about habit, but it was not merely the individual's habit' (GS 357). We have seen in Chapter 3 that Nietzsche offers an alternative to traditional epistemology by pointing to the factors that influence our perception of the world, and we have dwelt briefly on the physiological factors. Alan Schrift (1990: 147) points to a further set of prejudices that influence our perspectives, which he names the socio-historical. These are perspectives determined by the individual's personal set of circumstances, as well as the socio-political situation in which he finds himself. This is why no individual can ultimately express anything else but himself, and if he is lucky, his times. As we shall see in our Chapters 8 and 9 however, this should not be taken as a restatement of an 'expressive' self *à la Rousseau*. It simply means that every 'individual's' history starts long before his birth: 'You are still burdened with those estimates of things that have their origin in the passions and loves of former centuries' (GS 57). We are always in our own company and in that of our forebears. Our notion of causality is also an instance of our teleological prejudices. We tend to regard the effect as the *purpose* of the alleged 'cause'.

Much has been made of the passive Nietzsche ever since the Second World War, as a response to the overambitious romantic subject who could, or thought that he could; shape the world in his own image. However, Nietzsche's self is not that of Levinas, but a unique mixture of assertiveness and classical submission to fate. It is clear that Nietzsche rejoices in the creative potentiality of the self, every aspect of it, even the most everyday. That we *have* concepts like causality is a testament to man's mythopoetic power. Man is more creative than he thinks.

For between two absolutely different spheres [such as between subject and observed world], there is no causality, no exact correlation, and no

expression, but at best, an *aesthetic* relation; I mean an allusive transportation, a halting translation into an entirely foreign language. (OL 1)

And:

A continuum stands before us from which we isolate a pair of fragments, just as in the same way we perceive a movement as isolated points, and therefore do not properly see but infer it. . . . There is an infinite set of processes in that abrupt second which evades us. (GS 112)

Causality, like most metaphysical stalwarts, is therefore a fiction. 'Even the famous '*causa finalis*' of the world is a piece of pure poetry' (UM III). It logically depends on other fictional constructions; it is fiction all the way down. There are no necessary connections between isolated things; in order to have a world at all, we have to, as E. M. Forster would hold in the ethical context, 'only connect'.

One should not mistakenly objectify 'cause' and 'effect' in the manner of the natural scientist (and whoever thinks like him, naturalistically). . . . One should make use of 'cause' and 'effect' as 'pure' concepts only, that is to say, as conventional fictions for the purpose of designation and communication, *not* for explanation. In the *an sich* there is nothing of 'causal' connection, of 'necessity', or of 'psychological unfreedom' there is no following of effect after cause. No laws hold. It is we *alone* who have invented the causes; the after-anothers, the relations, the constraint, the for-anothers, the relations, the constraint, the number, the law, the ground, the purpose. And if this sign-world is thought into things, as though they were something in themselves, we conduct ourselves once again as we have always done: we think mythopoetically. (BGE 21)

While Hume simply pointed to the futility of trying to find either a first cause, or indubitable scientific fact, Nietzsche took this for granted and asked a further important question: why do we *need* first causes so badly?

The question 'why' is always the question of the *causa finalis* of a 'what for?' We have no sense of the '*causa efficiens*': here Hume is right, habit (but not only of the individual!) makes us expect that a certain frequently observed event follows another: nothing more! (Aphorism 10964, NL 1885–1887)

The early Nietzsche is more forgiving about metaphysical constructions, believing them to be inevitable by-products of evolution, signifying nothing in particular. In *HAH*, section 18, Nietzsche insists that the belief in 'unconditioned substances and identical beings is a primary ancient error committed by everything organic', and that we have inherited it from the time of the 'lower organisms'. Nietzsche regards this as a purely perceptual mistake, caused by a failure to notice changes in things. Interestingly, however, unlike Hume who is happy to take the notion of causality apart and let it rest at that, the later Nietzsche openly states that we would not have been able to survive, let alone operate as human beings, without the delusion of permanence in nature: 'In order that the concept of substance could originate – which is indispensable to logic although in the strictest sense nothing corresponds to it – it was likewise necessary that for a long time one did not see nor perceive the changes in things. The beings that did not see so precisely had an advantage over those who saw everything in flux' (*GS* 11). Nevertheless, to claim that something is useful *sub specie aeternitatis*, is to allow once useful categories to calcify into rigid, limiting constructions. Over time, what was once useful, can show itself to be a life-denying shackle in another time and place.

According to Nietzsche, philosophers have always made the mistake of seeing both understanding and 'misunderstanding' (*BGE* 6) as mere instruments of the intellect. What they have not realized, is that their ideas also reflect their prejudices and their tastes. Western philosophers' hatred of becoming prejudiced in favour of static being and inclined them to consider being and becoming as mutually exclusive.

This is the first stage of what would in Nietzsche's own time unfold itself as nihilism. This occurs, when, as Nietzsche so famously states, the highest values devalue themselves and all sense, metaphysical, and by implication, moral and religious, slips away. All that remains is a great weariness, a grand 'disgust' of man towards both himself and the world he inhabits. Signifiers are drained of their meaning, because they all become 'equalized': the good, the bad and the ugly are all the same. Neither moral nor aesthetic standards are left. 'The desert is growing' says Zarathustra (*ZIV*, 'Among the Daughters of the Desert'). It is when man becomes aware of its *wasted* strength, and looks to find meaning in events that 'are not there' [anymore] (*WP* 12), that nihilism manifests itself as a very real problem. Nihilism is always present in some or other form – Nietzsche is no shallow sentimentalist who yearns for antiquity. His diagnosis of nihilism as 'the most alarming of all guests' (*WP* 1), is also a *critical* strategy. Nihilism is but

a passing pathological condition, and an inevitable necessity before a new set of values can be born.

Nihilism, like most decadent phenomena, has a long history. It first manifests itself as transcendental nihilism. This occurs when man moves life's centre of gravity out of life itself, into a supra-sensory realm of absolute Ideas. This includes all efforts to posit a beyond, a world beyond this one, be it in the form of Platonism, Christianity, 'the Platonism for the people' (*BGE*, Preface) or the cold Königsbergian nihilism of Kant. Plato turned the act of evaluating into one of 'knowing', allowing access to the world of Ideas only for the assiduously schooled rationalist, forgetting that by doing so, he was more of a world-creator than an Idea-finder. Christianity continued this tradition, opening the world of Ideas to the repentant sinner in the Afterworld. With Kant, the transcendental becomes yet more meagre, and is now limited to the *a priori* structures of consciousness and the *Ding an Sich*. At this stage, nihilism is still active and optimistic – it posits abstractions and creates worlds, but any world that is purely the creation of man's power to abstract, has but a limited lifetime. Like Hume, he considers the existence of such transcendental structures to be 'absolutely indemonstrable' (*TI* III, 6). If anything, it shows its own 'inveterate mendaciousness' (*WP* 12), because it cultivates a desire for truth that will inevitably find the notion of these higher values absurd and unconscionable. What began in Christianity as the desire to demonstrate a clean conscience, became transformed – as Foucault were to show too – into the sterile philosophical-scientific cleanliness of the modern era, against which no idle construction stands a chance. The inevitable result was that the world of the theologians collapsed – the world had no unity or higher purpose, and ultimately, no final truth.

Nietzsche describes modernity as the forum where the various reactions to the death of God clash. One response is passive nihilism.

Extreme positions are not succeeded by moderate ones, but by extreme positions of the opposite kind. Thus the belief in the absolute immorality of nature, in aim and meaninglessness is the psychological necessary affect once the belief in god and in an essentially moral order becomes untenable. One interpretation has collapsed; but because it was considered *the* interpretation, it now seems as if there were no meaning at all in existence, as if everything were in vain. (*WP* 55)

This is why Nietzsche can be said to be sceptical about scepticism's value as life enhancer. With radical scepticism, the will has become bent upon its

own retirement, and the strong values and goals upon which every culture relies, is dissolved, leaving a kind of Schopenhauerian torpor in which no one has the will either to judge or create. Scepticism can be but a moment in philosophy. The sceptic, even when correct, embodies purely reactionary values. After all, one can be sceptical only about the statements of others. The sceptic is thus a reaction to another's law-making and creating. Pure scepticism embodies a further stage in Nietzsche's long history of Platonic-Christian induced nihilism. This is where Nietzsche turns the tables on thinkers like Hume: far from being a radical break in the history of Platonic-Christian nihilism, they embody its logical conclusion. The world which follows from this long tale of truth-obsession is an anxious one:

In the horizon of the infinite. We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. (GS 124)

At bottom, every high degree of caution in making inferences and every sceptical tendency constitute a high degree of danger for life. No living beings would have survived if the opposite tendency – to affirm rather than suspend judgement, to err and *make things up* – rather than to wait, to assent rather than to negate, to pass judgement rather than be just – had not been bred to the point where it became extraordinarily strong (GS 111).

This sentiment is echoed in an oft-quoted section from WP 493, which reads that 'Truth is the kind of error without which a certain species could not live. Nietzsche describes the crisis that is modern nihilism as a "calamity" that has "wiped out the horizon"' (GS 125), which leaves human beings bereft of any authoritative reference or shared ground to underpin their understanding of the world, themselves and each other. Nihilism in this context means *measurelessness*, or the disappearance of a meaning-giving conceptual framework. For Nietzsche, this is the result of an epistemological obsession with detached observation.

Given Nietzsche's insistence upon the radical metaphoricity of all forms of discursive knowledge, it should be clear that scepticism is merely an aspect of the Nietzschean project, an accurate epistemological stance towards the self-defeating aims of absolute and total knowledge. Philosophy is for Nietzsche not a matter of verisimilitude, but primarily a discourse

consisting of various interpretative practices and shaped by a number of extrinsic criteria. Rather than to serve as a 'corrector of fools', Nietzsche seeks to explore the motivations, and evaluate their ultimate aims. Without being a simple pragmatist, or – God forbid – a utilitarian, Nietzsche holds that any belief system should be evaluated by its usefulness rather than its truth value.

As in the case of Locke, Nietzsche does not *deny* the claims of empiricism. If anything, he takes them more seriously than they themselves do. For one, Nietzsche acknowledges that 'knowledge' does not come naked into the world: 'Reason' is the cause of our falsification of the testament of the senses. Insofar as the senses show becoming, decay, change, they do not lie (*TI*, 'Reason in Philosophy'). Metaphysics is the result of the refusal to accede to this point, for its system cannot accept the notion of truth as a function of something else, nor dare it allow for the possibility of anything else existing beyond the dichotomy of truth and falsehood, let alone that the criteria for truth and falsehood are dynamic and historically determined. Denouncing non-identity and change as signs of untruth, a supersensuous, supra-linguistic realm of true Being is constructed, which in the case of religion takes on some version of a paradise of redemption. Its secularized form is even less imaginative, as it becomes the structure underlying the world, as in the case of Kant's noumenon, or the subatomic microstructures of matter and energy as posited by the natural sciences.

Nietzsche's project is less about overturning the truths of metaphysics than displacing it. 'Overturning' carries overtones of a merely inverted Platonism, but by displacing metaphysics, Nietzsche is questioning its *value*. As the reader would have picked up on, the British philosophers discussed so far, all seem to stop thinking just as they seem to arrive at what would have been their most interesting conclusions. Hume is the least guilty of this of all the thinkers discussed so far, but he too, upholds the search for truth as the single standard by which the success of the philosophical endeavour is to be judged. The next necessary step would have been to ask why truth is considered to be so *valuable*, and then what kind of creature manifests itself in the search for truth.

If it is true, as Maudemarie Clark argues in *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Clark 1990: 215) that 'Nietzsche has no theory of truth', it is because Nietzsche holds, contrary to what must be the entire edifice of Western philosophy, that truth needs no defenders. The birth of metaphysics can be ascribed to a particular anxiety that have been haunting Western philosophy since its inception in Athens: the fear that truth is somehow fragile and in short supply, and has to be defended at all costs.

Contrary to many misunderstandings that read Nietzsche's perspectivism as a defence of some kind of relativism, it is possible to argue that Nietzsche sees our perspectival engagement with the world as not *allowing* relativistic chaos to happen. Perspectives, for Nietzsche, are not disembodied points of view hovering disinterestedly over the world. Instead of trying to do away with the notion of perspective, which Nietzsche describes as an act of self-directed castration, we should appropriate the multiplicity of perspectives for a more complete vision of the world. There is no need to defend a lost 'objective truth', for it has never existed.

The only seeing we have is seeing from a perspective; the only knowledge we have is knowledge from a perspective. The more emotional affects we allow to be expressed in words concerning something, the more eyes, different eyes, we know how to train on the same thing, the more complete our 'idea' of this thing, our 'objectivity', will be. But to eliminate the will in general, to suspend all our emotions without exception – even if we were capable of that – what would that be? Wouldn't we call that castrating the intellect? (*GM III*, 12)

Perspectivism thus implies that knowledge is only really possible once our affective engagement with the world is acknowledged. Until this happens, we can at best speak of a desiccated, anaemic simulacrum of knowledge. Nietzsche's rehabilitation of the metaphoric of vision in pluralist form returns the knower to his body, suffused with affect, inextricably situated in the world and inscribed by the torment and pain inflicted by moralizing mores and disciplining institutions. The task of the Wissenschaftler is to compile as exhaustive an aggregation of radically different perspectives as possible, a chorus of situated voices. The insistence upon locating a single 'correct' perspective leads, paradoxically, to a diminution of knowledge and an impoverished, ascetic existence. It is possible to argue that, instead of upholding a standard of 'pure' or absolute objectivity, Nietzsche is arguing for a standard of truth that can best be described in Sandra Harding's term as 'strong objectivity' rather than absolute objectivity. Nietzsche, in fact, presents us with a plea for such a sense of objectivity by arguing for 'more eyes, more ears'.

This point can easily be illustrated by referring to an ancient Indian fable of six blind men who wanted to 'see' an elephant by touching it. They were presented with a first-class specimen, but, overawed by the experience, each grabbed hold of a different part of the anatomy and did not explore any further. Afterwards, the men were asked to describe the elephant in their own words.

The first, who touched the trunk, said that 'An elephant is like a pipe. Rubbery, and ribbed.'

The second, who took the tail, said that an elephant was like a piece of rope. 'Thin and stringy, and frayed at the end.'

The third, who caressed a tusk, said that an elephant is like a slender curved marble column, that tapered towards the end.

The fourth stroked the animal along one side, and said that an elephant is like a wall: flat and rough to the touch.

The fifth, who held a leg, said that an elephant is like long column, solidly planted.

The sixth, who was very tall, touched an ear, and concluded that an elephant is like a cauliflower, soft and leafy.

But they all agreed that there was an elephant.

If anything, Truth needs to be saved from those who have sworn to protect her. She needs freedom to move around. The inability to understand the significance of the passing of time is of the key objections to modernity in general, and the English in particular. It can affect even something as apparently simple as the mere observation of one's writing desk.

This had important consequences for any theory of identity, be it the merely physical identity of objects over time, or the positive conundrum of human identity as such. Hume was the first to launch a sceptical challenge to those who adhered to representational realism, or what he called the 'double existence' theory of perception. This theory replaced the naïve realistic view of 'the man on the street'. It holds that we are not directly aware of external objects, but only aware of perceptions that serve as their representations. Berkeley has already proven that these theories do not withstand sceptical refutation, but Hume goes one step further:

There are no principles, either of the understanding or fancy, that lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, and nor can we arrive at it by passing through common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions. (Hume 1975: 211)

The theory of double existence is thus strictly speaking, the causal product of competing forces playing out in the theatre of the mind.

The imagination tells us that our resembling perceptions have a continu'd and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted

in their existence, and different from each other. The contradictions between these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypotheses both of reflection and fancy, by ascribing these contrary qualities to different existences; the *interruption* to perceptions, and the *continuance* of objects. (Hume 1975: 211)

The theory of double representation is thus not a simple replacement of the naive view, rather a continuance of it. Philosophers do not have much of a choice over this, due to the perceptual prejudices they have inherited, they tend to find themselves right back at the position they claim to have overcome. As we have seen in the introduction, modern philosophy and English philosophy in particular, have an obsession with philosophical exorcism: the mediated and the impure must be driven out so that only the purely rational remains. Hume anticipated Nietzsche by showing that the world – or ‘Nature’ – does not deal in neat, demarcated units. It is we doing the demarcation, and by doing so, we inevitably leap into the problem of positing two worlds: the ‘real’ world, or noumenon, as Kant called it later, and the world we inhabit in our minds. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this makes us legislators of the living world. Hume was very much aware of what he called the power of the ‘imagination’.

But tho’ resemblance be the relation, which most readily produces a mistake in ideas, yet the others of causation and contiguity may also concur in the same influence. We might produce the figures of orators and poets, as sufficient proofs of this were it as usual, as is reasonable, in metaphysical subjects to draw our arguments from that quarter. (Hume 1975: 216)

Hume reveals that the question of identity inevitably leads to paradox. To say that two things are identical, for example, the yellow-wood desk observed at present is identical with, or the same as, the desk seen a week ago. Strictly speaking, however, this is impossible, for the desk now and the desk then involve two separate cognitive events. The desk is the same, and yet not the same: identity involves a relation of at least a pair, but a pair is different, both members of a pair have their own unique singularity. A can never be *identical* with B, since A being A, can never be *identical* with B. As long as there is an A and a B, they will, for one, occupy separate spaces. Great similarity does not equal identity.

The view of any object is not sufficient to convey the identity. For in that proposition, *an object is the same with itself* if the idea express’d by the word

were in no ways distinguish'd from that meant by *itself*; we really should mean nothing. . . . One single idea conveys the idea of unity, not of identity. On the other hand, a multiplicity of ideas can never convey this idea, however resembling they may be suppos'd. The mind always pronounces the one not to be the other, and consider them as forming two, three, or any determinate objects, whose existences are entirely distinct and independent. (Hume 1975: 212)

The central problem is to find a medium between unity and number, even though unity and number appear at first sight to be as mutually exclusive as existence and non-existence. The best way is to raise the matter of continuance first.

To take the desk example again: the desk I am looking at now appears to be the same as the one observed five minutes ago. It still possesses the same smooth yellow-wood, the same elegant dark inlays. It is, for all intents and purposes, the same desk.

The desk may be same (so we assume), but the subject observing it has changed. Between the first and second observation, a number of different ideas and impressions have flitted past, there has been a circulation of oxygen, a tensing and relaxing of muscle (also ocular muscle), and thousands of nerve points have been stimulated. As long as one pays exclusive attention to the datum (the desk), one finds unity, but as soon as one moves on to the somatic data, one gets difference. In neither case is it possible to speak easily of identity. However, if the two experiences are mixed, then we get closer. When we say that the desk is the same as the one from a minute ago, we project into what is essentially a continuous, unchanging datum (unity), a temporal difference obtained from my experience of a succession of somatic data (difference). Hence, the idea of difference, data now, data later, is a product of the imagination. It is the somatic data, not the desk itself which appears in succession. Because the mind feigns that the succession of the somatic data is in the yellow datum, it is easy to conclude that two different, but otherwise unchanging data have been experienced.

This is not the end of the story, however. As soon as we obtain the idea of identity through this kind of confusion or synthesis, we begin to apply it universally, even to cases where a datum is not under continuous observation. As we have seen, the first impression of the yellow desk differs at least numerically, from the second. It is easy, once having overlooked this difference, to overlook other differences and to feign that a second datum, which strictly speaking, only resembles the first, is identical with it. Consider, for example, the difference in the fall of light. Our yellow-wood desk looks

quite different in the light of a bright morning, than the light of dusk. Yet we nevertheless regard the two impressions as one. The reasons are once more in the mind, and one of the principles that make the existence of complex ideas possible, namely *resemblance*.

Nothing is more apt than to make us mistake one idea for another, than any relation betwixt them, which associates them together in the imagination, and makes it pass with facility from one to the other. Of all relations, that of resemblance is in this respect the most efficacious, and that because it not only causes an association of ideas, but also of dispositions, and makes us conceive the one idea by an act of operation of the mind, similar to that by which we conceive the other. . . . Whatever ideas place the mind in the same disposition, or in similar ones, are very apt to be confounded. (Hume 1975: 102)

Because the disposition invoked by different empirical data appears the same in each instance, and because the data is not examined on its own account in every individual case, but are taken as the *sign* of the desk, we assume that the data is identical in each case. In this way, a succession of sensual data objects resembling one another are confounded with an unchanging object experienced against a background of temporal change. If, however, Hume holds, we are to pay careful attention to objects that are commonly called 'identical', we will find that these objects are found to be 'variable or interrupted' or to consist of a succession of related parts. As Nietzsche puts it in *WP* 574: 'It is we who created the 'thing', the 'identical thing'.

If the identity of physical objects is so hard to establish, human identity is a positive conundrum. Looking into his own mind, Hume could discover no enduring impression on which he could base the attribution of an enduring identity from one moment to the next:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or the other of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never observe anything except the perception. (Hume 1965: 252)

Hume believes there is a gap between what we think we experience, and what we actually experience. We take our continuous existence for granted, while there are gaps and interruptions in our impressions: 'Our

perceptions are broken [. . .] however the fancy directly and immediately proceeds to the belief of another existence resembling those perceptions of their nature but continued, uninterrupted and identical' (Hume 1975: 213). For this reason, beliefs in such metaphysical concepts such as that of the will are not truly tenable. Nietzsche was of course quite adamant on this point.

Today we no longer believe a word of all this. The 'inner world' is full of phantoms and will-o'-the-wisps: the will is one of them. The will no longer moves anything, hence does not explain anything either, it merely accompanies events; it can also be absent. (*TI*, 'The Four Great Errors', 3)

Contrary to popular belief, Nietzsche does not automatically damn those who believe in the fiction of the subject. The categories of reason, including the subject, are sometimes a necessary evil.

In the end, must not all philosophy bring to light the presuppositions upon which rest the exercise of reason? Our belief in the I, as in substance, as in our only reality, in accordance with which we grant reality to things in general? The oldest realism at last comes to light, at the same time as the entire religious history of mankind recognizes itself as the history of the soul superstition. Here is a limit: our thinking itself involves this belief (with its distinctions of substance/accident, deed, doer etc); to let it go means no longer to be able to think. (*WP* 296)

One of the most persistent Nietzschean complaints about man is that he simply remembers too well, and as a result, he has burdened himself with a soul:

One must revise one's ideas about memory: here lies the chief temptation to assume a 'soul,' which, outside time, reproduces, recognizes, etc. But that which is experienced lives on 'in the memory': I cannot help it if it 'comes back,' the will is inactive in this case, as in the coming of any thought. Something happens of which I become conscious: now something similar comes – who called it? roused it? (*WP* 502, *NL* 1885–1886)

Man does not simply have the option of exchanging the incorrect for the correct: as we have seen, physiology often decides for us. Nietzsche and Hume share an approach to human nature the focus of which is primarily *psychological*. Nietzsche's vocabulary of course, consists of drives, affects,

sublimation and the will to power; for Hume there are impressions and ideas, passions and sentiments, association and the imagination. Similar to Nietzsche's 'physician', Hume describes himself as an 'anatomist of the soul' (Hume 1978: 621). Being interested in origins, he also interested himself in the origins of morality. What Nietzsche calls 'genealogy', Hume calls 'experimental reasoning, the formulation of hypotheses about which causes could have led to which effects. Whereas Hume persisted in a detached observational stance so typical of British thinkers, Nietzsche openly declares his interest in finding out how inferior value systems replace nobler ones.

For Nietzsche, from early in his career, the question of causality had far more important philosophical implications than mere empirical correctness. For him, it was the factor that bound popular morality together. Comparing popular morality and popular medicine in *D* 11, he writes:

The morality that prevails in a particular community is constantly being worked at by everybody: most people produce example after example of the alleged relationship between cause and effect, guilt and punishment, confirm it as well founded and strengthen their faith: some observe actions and their consequences afresh and draw conclusions and laws from their observations: a very few take exception here and there, and thus diminish faith on these points.

This is why morality is more of a construction than a product of discoverable universal laws. In most cases, too, it is a very crude construction, akin to folk medicine:

All, however, are at one with this wholly crude and unscientific character of their activity: whether it is a matter of making observations, producing examples, or taking exception; whether it is a matter of proving, confirming, expressing or refuting a law – both material and form are worthless, as are the material and form of all popular medicine. Popular medicine and popular morality belong together and ought not to be evaluated as differently as they still are – both are dangerous pseudo-sciences. (*D* 11)

Nietzsche returns to man's situated and perspective-structured existence precisely in order to counter nihilism by re-evaluating man's most *human* characteristics, the capacity to judge and the ability to create limits, laws and protective frameworks.

What makes Nietzsche truly an optimistic philosopher is his faith in human becoming; in the ability of the 'as yet undetermined animal' to rise above his current nihilistic condition and achieve new ideals. Nietzsche's doctrine of unavoidable perspectivism is a reminder that the indeterminacy of both the human being and his world is not *absolute*; nothing in the world can appear as 'pure' formlessness. Indeterminacy is always bound to a particular form. These conditions make it possible for man to live and function as *judge*: the world is malleable enough to operate as playing field for the legislators of the future, yet resistant enough to make the act of legislation meaningful.

For very similar reasons, Nietzsche's position of the question of God differs radically from that of Hume, although both reject the Judeo-Christian God.

There is, of course, no denial that Hume played his part in hastening the death of God. For him, of course, it is an epistemological matter. All demonstrative knowledge is a matter of the consequences of names and logic. Naturally, he rejected all forms of causal proof, Berkeleian or Cartesian. Dicta such as Descartes's 'Every cause must have at least as much reality as its effect' were meaningless in Hume's view. Try to find anything in experience that corresponds to 'must' or 'reality' in this sentence and you would be obliged to consign it to the flames.

The same goes for the famous Argument from Design, a popular 'proof' of God in the eighteenth century. According to this argument, the complexity and wonder of the world testifies to the existence of beneficent creator, looking out for man's interests. After fairly considering the argument, Hume dismisses it as follows. First, as we have seen, causality refers to *classes* of events, and it is not possible to speak of the cause of a single event, such as the birth of the universe as a whole. In the second instance, it is an argument from analogy, and this analogy is no more rational than the conclusion that the world is produced by a kind of vegetative process than according to a rational plan. Thirdly, just because some aspects of the universe, such as biological organisms seem to adhere to a means-end structure, it does not follow that this structure was designed. And even if one were to allow something along the lines of an intelligent designer, there is absolutely no evidence that this being has moral characteristics.

What is at once strange, puzzling and unsettling about Nietzsche's most famous pronouncement about God in GS 125, and in the Prologue of *Zarathustra* where the eponymous hero encounters the old hermit in the forest on his way to the village is that God is *dead*, not non-existent. Even

his shadow is still to be found for a couple of centuries more. Nietzsche is simply not interested in the epistemological status of God, but in what the myth can do for man. Man is measured by the size (or at least the grandeur and health) of his God. Nietzsche wanted a God that was worth worshipping. A potent fiction is worth much more than an impotent fact.

Remarkably, Hume, like Nietzsche prefers ancient polytheism to Christian monotheism. Sounding remarkably Nietzschean, he writes that since the gods of polytheism are 'conceived to be only a little superior to mankind' we may 'aspire sometimes to a rivalry and emulation of them. Hence activity, spirit, courage, magnanimity, love of liberty, and all the virtues which aggrandize a people' (Hume 1993: 163–164). He continues:

Instead of the destruction of monsters, the subduing of tyrants, the defence of our native country; whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission is become the means of obtaining celestial honours among mankind. (Hume 1993: 164)

Christianity encourages 'monkish virtues' like 'celibacy, fasting penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude' (Hume 1993: 270). This has a distinct flavour of Nietzsche's condemnation of the life-denying ascetic values of the priestly type.

Even more remarkable is the fact that Hume and Nietzsche almost mirror each other in finding the source of asceticism in Christianity's tendency to describe its Deity in terms wholly *other* to man:

Where the deity is represented as infinitely superior to mankind, this belief [i.e. in the deity] though altogether just, is apt, when joined to superstitious terrors, to sink the human mind to the lowest submission and abasement, and to represent the monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility, and passive suffering, as the only qualities acceptable to them. (Hume 1993: 163)

What is un-Greek in Christianity. The Greeks did not see the Homeric gods above them as masters and themselves below them as servants, as did the Jews. They saw, as it were, only the reflection of the most successful specimens of their own caste, that is, an ideal, not a contrast to their own nature. They felt related to them, there was a reciprocal interest, a kind of *symmachia*. Man thinks of himself as noble when he gives himself such gods, and puts himself into a relationship similar to that of the lesser nobility to the higher.

Christianity, on the other hand, crushed and shattered man completely, and submerged him as if in deep mire. Then, all at once, into his feeling of complete confusion, it allowed the light of divine compassion to shine, so that the surprised man, stunned by mercy, let out a cry of rapture, and thought for a moment that he carried all of heaven within him. All psychological inventions of Christianity work towards this sick excess of feeling, towards the deep corruption of head and heart necessary for it. Christianity wants to destroy, shatter, stun, intoxicate: there is only one thing it does not want: moderation, and for this reason, it is in its deepest meaning barbaric, Asiatic, ignoble, un-Greek (*HAH* 114).

Hume too, finds revenge at the heart of Christian morality: 'revenge reigns in the greatest force in priests' but 'being deprived of the immediate exertion of anger, in violence and combat, they are apt to fancy themselves despised on that account; and their pride supports their vindictive disposition' (Hume 1985: 201). Nietzsche, of course, famously, took Pascal to be the prototype of the nihilistic priest (e.g. *A* 5; *BGE* 45), but it should come as a surprise to the reader that Hume did the same. Pascal, says Hume, 'made constant profession of humility and abasement, and of the contempt and hatred of himself' and 'refused himself the most innocent pleasures' (Hume 1975: 342). Pascal distorted his 'natural moral inclinations' which could have led to a useful and productive life. Instead, he suppressed those, occupying himself with 'sick men's dreams' (Hume 1993: 184), which again, has overtones of Nietzsche's accusation that the Christian is the 'sick animal man' (*A* 3). Like Nietzsche, Hume famously held that morality depends upon custom, or at least sentiment, not apodictic truth – 'all morality depends upon sentiments' (Hume 1975: 51) – and can therefore be changed.

Remarkably, like Nietzsche, Hume does not take the striving after truth to be intrinsically valuable:

Why must seclude I myself . . . from the commerce and society of men, which is so agreeable; and that I must torture my brain with subtleties and sophistries. . . . Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest? No: if I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with. (Hume 1975: 270)

Importantly, however, Hume serves truth by demonstrating the limits of the correspondence theory of truth. It is true that truth makes no promises. But there it ends – Hume offers no further hope in order to help his readers to overcome the inevitable nihilism that results from his deconstructive efforts. This is a challenge that Nietzsche would take up.

In antithesis to the three incomplete or passive forms of nihilism stands what Nietzsche terms active nihilism. Because of the world's fundamental ambiguity, 'the very same symptoms could point to decline and to strength' (WP 110). As a sign of strength, active nihilism also undermines foundational categories of aim, unity and Being, but this time no longer serves as grounds for despising the world. Rather, when active nihilism comes into play these categories are acceptable but as something transitional, something that happened on the way to greater values. Like passive nihilism, active nihilism destroys, but it is never *merely* destructive. Active nihilism, and the regenerative possibilities with it, emerges when the subject reconciles itself to a perspectival existence with its dependence on interpretation. The removal of the traditionally privileged status of 'truth' or the 'thing-in-itself', opens the way for the creative play of interpretation. 'Truth' was a limit that prevented the more aesthetically minded individual from moving beyond its borders, but the removal of 'truth' now invites the individual to explore fresh domains of creative possibilities. Nietzsche's genealogies expose a subject too frightened to create within the flux of becoming, and hopelessly dependent on the will to truth:

Man seeks 'the truth': a world that is not self-contradictory, not deceptive, does not change, a *true* world – a world in which one does not suffer; contradiction, deception, change – *causes* of suffering! He does not doubt that the world as it ought to be exists; he would like to seek out the road to it. . . .

The belief that the world as it ought to be *is*, really exists, and is a belief of the unproductive who do *not desire to create a world* as it ought to be. They posit it as already available, they seek ways and means of reaching it. Will to truth – as the *impotence of the will to create*. (WP 585)

Active nihilism means legislating anew, the erasure and replacement of existing values, or else their sublimation. With the abolition of the distinction between 'real' and 'apparent' worlds, men are faced with the challenge of overcoming themselves as they have hitherto existed, and embracing *Übermenschlichkeit*. This is however much more difficult than it sounds. Overcoming nihilism is not simply an easy recovery of the 'sensuous' and

the 'real'. This leads far too easily to positivism (epistemologically speaking) or to the inability to negate. To use an example from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*: After Zarathustra informed the higher men of what is to be their singular duty in overcoming the last men, he moves off to commune with his animals. His musings are, however, interrupted by the sweet-smelling vapour of incense. When he returns to his guests, he is, like Moses before him, enraged to find them kneeling around an ass, praying to it. The all-affirming ass is the caricature of Zarathustra's teaching on affirmation. The ugliest man describes the animal as one who is 'patient from the heart', and importantly for our purpose, *never says nay*. The 'higher man' of Book IV is clearly not yet ready to take on his duty to legislate. Because he longs to affirm, but cannot bear the pain of nay-saying, he has relapsed into permanent reactivity and therefore dispensed utterly with his role as negator. And without negation, there are neither values nor justice. A yes-saying to the world also implies the ability to discern, distinguish and discriminate. Whoever simply says yes to *everything*, may just as well have been a nay-sayer.

Note

- ^{1.} See also GS 121, 127, 205, 217, 357, 360, 374, and *TI*, 'The Four Great Errors', 1, 2, 3.

Chapter 5

‘Some Have Suspected Me of Darwinism’

As much as Nietzsche engaged with Darwin, he is for Nietzsche not much more than a footnote to Hegel. He is the biological symptom of an age sick with its own history. Indeed, he goes as far as to say that ‘without Hegel, there would have been no Darwin’ (GS 357). Both Hegel and Darwin are ‘deifiers of success’ who see human history in terms of a single narrative, driven by a single mechanism, lending a stifling inevitability to it. Before anything else, Darwin added to the contemporary problem of seeing history as a *process*. One of the most dangerous responses to nihilism – which without a doubt exacerbated it – is the insistence upon rational explanations that master the vagaries of human existence in its totality. Science appears to offer a respite from the shakiness of worldly existence by including all events and actions under abstract laws of development. In this way a false sense of optimism is created: transitory existence is redeemed by participating in the progressive unfolding of higher aims of history. But why stop at the *human* species? This narrative could include the totality of biological life!

Besides Darwin’s failure to deliver on creative potential, Nietzsche found it very disappointing that the eschatology implied by his discoveries did not materialize. It was not the fact that Darwin killed God that raised the Nietzschean ire, but the fact that God was still very much alive after the reception of *The Origin of the Species*. All that Darwin in truth provided was a succinct *history* of the species. And Nietzsche makes clear in the second *UM* that the deification of history, particularly in the form of a Hegelian-styled Reason that pervades history and suggests that there is a progressive, rational movement immanent to history is especially problematic. This historical ‘illness’ leads to debilitation, whether in the form of idealism, or more commonly the case in England, materialism.

Nietzsche is often grouped together with a number of ‘hermeneuticians of suspicion’, thinkers who undermined the easy and certain subjectivity that flowed from Descartes. This conception of subjectivity, which as we have seen

in Chapter 3, takes an established subject *sub specie aeternitatis* for granted. That is to say, philosophy departs from an immutable subject beyond time that serves as the foundation for the entire philosophical edifice that developed during the Enlightenment. The hermeneuticians of suspicion in question usually refer to Marx and Freud, but Darwin is often included, too. Nietzsche, being Nietzsche, takes suspicion one step further, and subjected Darwin (or Darwinism, to be precise) to a perspectivist critique. One can be suspicious even of the hermeneutician of suspicion that failed to take his own times into account. Nietzsche returned Darwin to the nineteenth century.

Many of Nietzsche's insights can be traced to scientific materialist origins and much of his vocabulary is derived from biological origins. This does not mean, however, that they can after all, be fit into the uncomfortable metanarratives of biological perfection. It would be more correct to say that scientific materialism served as a fount of inspiration, much as he drew upon literary muses like Goethe and Shakespeare; he did not simply follow in the wake of science's success. His true critique concerns the residues of theologically derived moralism still present in natural science, not the 'petty details'. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Nietzsche did not automatically regard the triumph of a scientific theory to be valuable in itself. 'Correctness' is not a criterion for strength. As a matter of fact, the success of natural science far too easily makes it a seat of power that lays down rigid new rules that breed a new kind of conformity. Because its 'truths' are easily 'proven', they are less easily challenged. To challenge arbitrary power is hard enough, but to go against the obviously 'legitimate' power of the scientist is simply beyond the *energy* of most people. Biological 'truth' gives slaves a reason to conform. And they hardly need any encouragement. Consider Nietzsche's words from *Schopenhauer as Educator* (SE):

A traveller who had seen many countries, peoples and several of the earth's continents was asked what attribute he had found in men everywhere. He said: 'They have a propensity for laziness.' To others, it seems that he should have said: 'They are all fearful. They hide themselves behind customs and opinions.' In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that there will be no second chance for his oneness to coalesce from the strangely variegated assortment that he is: he knows it but hides it like a bad conscience – why? (SE, opening lines)

The mere fact that a debate over the alleged 'independence' of the theory of evolution continues to crop up in Darwinist circles proves the need for

a Nietzschean reminder of the importance of non-biological criteria for strength. In 'Independence, History and Natural Selection' (Hodge and Radick 2006: 144) Gregory Radick reminds his readers that 'Darwin's theory of natural selection was no gift of sheer, solitary genius, but in several key aspects a product of Victorian culture'. This can be seen as an example of the inseparability thesis. This conclusion may be obvious to readers used to the death of the author, but even today Darwin is seen as a kind of *deus ex machine* [sic] that spontaneously brought enlightenment upon those still captured in the dark ages of religious belief. This is known as the independence thesis. According to this thesis, particular Victorian elements aided Darwin to identify a timeless truth about Nature. The identification of this thesis, however, was inevitable, if Darwin did not do so, someone else would have come along.

Thinkers like these fail to understand what the term *inevitable* really means in the context of human life: no discovery of anything in the world of contingency is ever inevitable. It is just as easy to conceive of a world where the theory of natural selection – despite its correctness or use value – were simply never discovered. There are thousands of paths that history could have taken. Furthermore, there are thousands of scientific facts that will simply never be discovered, and more still whose true significance and value will never be appreciated. Yet the human race will continue as it always has: with the ability to create either a rich, strong life, or a poor, mediocre one, out of the material available to it at a particular point in time. As can be seen in Chapter 6, Victorian England, with its Empire to run, strongly emphasized *use*. It was a world with a strong contempt for the 'superfluous' (think eugenics and the disregard for the lives of the natives colonized during Empire-building) with a strong pragmatic touch, all sprinkled liberally with the economics of Adam Smith. Darwinism was, if not exactly inevitable, at least a *typical* product of Victorian England. According to the historian Robert Young, the creation myth as seen in the book of Genesis was a myth that suited the agrarian, pastoral world ruled by aristocrats before the Industrial Revolution. Similarly, the theory of natural selection with its Malthusian undertones, obviously 'reflects a competitive, urban, industrial world' (Young 1985: 240). This means that Darwinism basically consists of a *reactive* vocabulary, shot through with herd sentiments. None other than Karl Marx, in a letter to his collaborator Friedrich Engels, wrote: 'It is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his English society with its division of labour, competition, opening up of new markets, "inventions", and the Malthusian struggle for existence. It is Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes*' [war of all against all]. (Marx quoted in Schmidt 1971: 46). This

is already a case of one hermeneutician of suspicion suspecting another. It was of course Engels who famously put Darwin's Malthusianism in its classic political context:

The whole Darwinist teaching of the struggle for existence is simply a transference from society to living nature of Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and of the *bourgeois*-economic doctrine of competition together with Malthus' theory of population. When this conjuror's trick has been performed, the same theories are transferred back again from organic nature into history, and it is now claimed that their validity as eternal laws of human society has been proved. (Schmidt 1971: 47)

It is not clear how much Nietzsche derived directly from Darwin; most of his sources are second hand, from sources like the Darwinians Ernst Haeckel, and Walter Bagehot, quoted twice in *UM* III, 'Schopenhauer as Educator'. It is clear, however, that Nietzsche was familiar with Herbert Spencer's *Data of Ethics*, translated into German in 1879.¹ Whereas Darwin occupied himself more or less with pure science – inasmuch as science can be pure – Spencer developed a social theory around the theory of natural selection which is every bit as teleological as Hegel. Spencer upholds a model of human development that sees egoism and altruism eventually reconciled. Hegel's influence is obvious in Spenserian remarks like 'Truth generally lies in the co-ordination of antagonistic opinions' (Spencer 1904: 16). This is mainly why Nietzsche regards him as a decadent.

Even the ideals of science can be deeply, even unconsciously, influenced by decadence: our entire sociology is proof of that. The objection to it is that from experience it knows only the form of decay of society, and inevitably it takes its own instincts of decay for the norms of sociological judgement.

In these norms, the life that is declining in present-day Europe formulates its social ideals: one cannot tell them from the ideals of old races that have outlived themselves. –

The herd instinct – a power that has now become sovereign – is something totally different from the instinct of an *aristocratic* society: and the value of the units determines the significance of the sum. Our entire sociology simply does not know any other instinct than that of the herd, i.e., that of *the sum of zeroes* – where every zero has equal rights; where it is virtuous to be zero. –

The valuation that is today applied to the different forms of society is entirely identical with that which assigns a higher value to peace than to war: but this judgement is antibiological, itself a fruit of the decadence of life. – Life is a consequence of war, society itself a means to war. – As a biologist, Mr. Herbert Spencer² is a decadent; as a moralist too (he considers the triumph of altruism a desideratum!!!) (WP 53)

Darwin may have been a genius, but he was a timely one. That is, unlike Nietzsche himself, he fitted the values of his age, even if, superficially, he appeared to be in conflict with its key institutions. As we will see in Chapter 6, his was an age that lacked ambition – mere survival and the search for pleasure was considered sufficient to serve as a sign of strength. However, survival is no measure for the *value* of life: it generates the same paradox as seeing the avoidance of pain and the hunt for pleasure as goals for existence. Natural selection gives us an account of how life came to be in its present form – not why the human phenomenon is worth having in the first place. Nietzsche gives us an answer to that question early in his *oeuvre*: it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that life is ultimately justified. That is, life becomes meaningful only through *human evaluation*. Although Nietzsche persistently asks that man be 'translated back into nature', he has something very different from Darwin in mind. Darwin certainly translates man back into nature. After *The Origin of the Species* there could no longer be a question of man as directly formed by a divine hand. However, there are better and worse translations. Edward Fitzgerald's translation *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam* is a work of art in itself. Reading crude determinism into Nature is not.

Before the publication of *The Origin of the Species*, the young German philologist took it for granted that the most important part of man's history was a *natural* history. As early as *HC*, Nietzsche describes man as a creature immersed in nature:

When we speak of humanity, the idea is fundamental that this is something that separates and distinguishes man from nature. In reality, there is no such separation: 'natural' qualities and those we call truly 'human' are inseparably grown together. Man in his highest and noblest capacities, is wholly nature and embodies its uncanny dual nature. (*HC*)

What Nietzsche objected to, is that modernity failed to seize upon the advantages that the new Darwinian theory offered. Rather than to recognize Nature as 'red in tooth and claw', nineteenth-century moralists

like sought to place Christian morality on an even more secure basis than Christian myth ever did. At least the latter had a Machiavelli to show for it. Instead of freeing up space for mastership, the 'rules' that the likes of Spencer read into 'Nature' threatened to secure man more tightly than ever before in a position of slavery. Where the priest in the black cassock was, there the one in the white coat shall be. Call an ascetic by any other name.

For Nietzsche, as was the case for Marx and Engels, the theory of natural selection only succeeds in lending support to the worst aspects of the reigning ideology. Nietzsche sees these as the reactive forces that triumphs in the form of modern culture. Giles Deleuze names these forces explicitly as 'adaptation, evolution, progress, happiness for all, and the good of the community' (Deleuze 1983: 151). Although Nietzsche obviously accepts the thesis that existence is struggle, he is far less optimistic that natural selection truly favours the strongest and the best. If anything, natural selection has only the welfare of the species in mind, not the quality of the individual. It appears to destroy the ill-adapted in a purely indifferent fashion, and forces species and individual alike to aim for a position of equilibrium and stability. Darwin himself made it clear in the third edition of *The Origin of the Species* that natural selection should not be understood as automatically bringing about variability; it is concerned only with the bringing about and preservation of variations that prove beneficial to a particular species and the environment in which it finds itself. As Ansell-Pearson points out, natural selection, with its emphasis on the preservation of the species, is actually a highly conservative strategy (2000: 89). Perhaps Marx and Engels were right: natural selection does appear to favour, if not the bourgeois in person, then at least their values. It should come as no surprise that John Stuart Mill, as hesitant as he was to grant natural selection the status of a fully fledged scientific hypothesis, he was willing to acknowledge it as a real, and not fictional causal process, a *vera causa* (Hull 1998: 327).

At the beginning of 'history', it is of course an entirely different story. There the strong warrior class conquers openly. Gradually, however, the bad consciousness pushed man into decadent overrefinement, not a goal for which Nietzsche considers worth striving. Writing about Paul Rée in the Preface to *GM* –

But he had read Darwin, so that to some extent in his hypotheses the Darwinian beast and the most modern modest and tender moral sensibility, which 'no longer bites', politely extend their hands to each other

in a way that is at least entertaining – with the latter bearing a facial expression revealing a certain good-natured and refined indolence, in which is mixed a grain of pessimism and exhaustion, as if it is really not worth taking all these things, the problems of morality, so seriously. (*GM*, Preface)

It is perhaps for this reason that Nietzsche avoids a Darwinian vocabulary in *GM*, and his Will to Power thesis. 'Adaptation' belongs to slaves; it is the yielding to external circumstances. It is an influence that shows itself only after the active, shaping powers have had their day on the worldly playing field. It is these forces that are of true importance in the world. The 'English psychologist' and scientist display their slavishness by depicting life in terms that bespeak poverty rather than richness. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this is a sign of a fundamental *mistrust* in life, or the 'musty air of English overpopulation' (*GS* 349) and the 'Salvation Army' (*BGE* 252). Like all the Englishmen hitherto discussed, Darwin, for all his interest in it, is secretly anti-life: for him, the will to self-preservation operates as an *excuse* for the struggles that accompany life in all its forms. It is thus, just like human laws formed under the delusion that it promotes 'justice' as a 'means *against* fighting in general' (*GMII*, 12). This attitude is in fact an assassination of the future of man, 'a secret path to nothingness' (*GMII*, 12) of an unambitious thinker.

Anti-Darwin. – As for the famous 'struggle for existence', so far it seems to me to be asserted rather than proved. It occurs, but as an exception; the total appearance of life is not the extremity, not starvation, but rather riches, profusion, even absurd squandering – and where there is struggle, it is a struggle for power. One should not mistake Malthus for nature.

Assuming, however, that there is such a struggle for existence – and, indeed, it occurs – its result is unfortunately the opposite of what Darwin's school desires, and of what one might perhaps desire with them – namely, in favor of the strong, the privileged, the fortunate exceptions. The species do not grow in perfection: the weak prevail over the strong again and again, for they are the great majority – and they are also more intelligent. Darwin forgot the spirit (that is English!); the weak have more spirit. One must need spirit to acquire spirit; one loses it when one no longer needs it. Whoever has strength dispenses with the spirit ('Let it go!' they think in Germany today; 'the Reich must still remain to us'). It will be noted that by 'spirit' I mean care, patience,

cunning, simulation, great self-control, and everything that is mimicry (the latter includes a great deal of so-called virtue). (*TI*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', 14)

Nietzsche prefers the less scientifically sound Lamarck, because he identified a truly active, plastic force prior in relation to adaptation – a force of metamorphosis. Strictly speaking, a revaluation of values would imply an overhaul of Darwinian values as well. This is perhaps why he distances himself from Darwin with such fierceness in *EH* III, I, where he expresses surprise at the naïve misunderstandings with which his *Zarathustra* was received 'Other scholarly oxen have suspected me of Darwinism'.

A richer approach than the narrow notion of the 'survival instinct' is the idea of the will to power.

The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation.

[. . .]

. . . that our modern natural sciences have become so thoroughly entangled in this Spinozaist dogma, most recently and worst of all, Darwinism with its incomprehensibly one-sided doctrine of the struggle for existence, is probably due to the origins of most natural scientists: In this respect they belong to the 'common people'; their ancestors were poor and undistinguished people who knew the difficulties of survival only too well at first hand. The whole of English Darwinism breathes something like the musty air of English overpopulation, like the smell of the distress of and overcrowding of small people. (*GS* 349)

Rather than to simply react to external forces, the Will to Power is part and parcel of them, creating forms from within; utilizing and exploiting external circumstances as the arena of its own agonal actions. To be true to Nietzsche though, the Will to Power is arena and actor all in one. With the will to Power, Nietzsche rehabilitates the active dimension to life, as well as the *playful* side to evolution. The development of an organism is no single story, there is no genuine link between origin and *telos*. Instead of speaking of evolution at all, one should rather speak of a series of successive life-forms subject to an immanent, open-ended dynamics. Understood in this way, every life-form is fluid and never final, nor are the aims or directions open to it. The world is indeed the Will to Power – and nothing else besides. Darwinian evolution is but a moment in the operation of the Will to Power – its bourgeois face.

As an approach to life, the Will to Power has much more to offer, it applies to all life-forms, not merely the biological. It also includes the physiological, psychological, technological and cultural domains.

[T]he 'development' of a thing, a practice, or an organ has nothing to do with its progress towards a single goal, even less is it the logical and shortest progress reached with the least expenditure of power and resources, but rather the sequence of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of overpowering which take place on that thing, together with the resistance which arises against that overpowering each time, the transformations of form which have been attempted for the purpose of defence and reaction, the results of successful countermeasures. Form is fluid – the 'meaning', however, is even more so. . . . Even within each individual organism things are no different: with every essential growth in the totality, the 'meaning' of an individual organ also shifts – in certain circumstances its partial destruction, a reduction of its numbers (for example, through the destruction of intermediate structures) can be a sign of growing power and perfection. (GM II, 12)

Importantly, as both Paul Patton and Keith Ansell-Pearson have pointed out, what matters for Nietzsche is the *experience* of power, not its actual exercise. That is to say, power is evaluated in terms of its intensity, not its extensity. It is the battle *itself*, and one's display of power in it, that matters, not some abstract teleological goal. Nietzsche was fast to distance himself from the utilitarian vocabulary of Charles Darwin:

'Useful' in the sense of Darwinian biology means: proved advantageous in the struggle with others. But it seems to me that the feeling of increase, the feeling of becoming stronger, is itself, quite apart from any usefulness in the struggle, the real progress: only from this feeling arises the will to struggle. – (WP 648)

Feeling powerful does not depend upon one's comparative power over someone else, as is the case with undiluted Darwinism. This puts the value of self-preservation into an entirely new perspective. Nietzsche warns that we should not automatically assume that the mere continuance of life is life's supreme goal:

Physiologists should think again before positing the 'instinct of preservation' as the cardinal drive in an organic creature. A living thing wants above all to *discharge* its force: 'preservation' is only a consequence of this.

Beware of *superfluous* teleological principles! The entire concept 'instinct of preservation' is one of them. (WP 650)

As much as Nietzsche argued for a return to Nature, he did not want to have man dictated to by her. If, as we have seen in Chapter 4, man was ultimately determined by the operations of nature, there was no need to emphasize this fact. Instead, man's freedom as a creator had to be celebrated. Because Nietzsche frequently emphasizes Becoming over Being, it does not follow automatically that he is positing becoming as the essence of existence. What this means is that the nature of power precludes thinking of it as in terms of the termination of a process, a mere end. Instead, it is always transitive or intentional, it is *potential*. That is, power never simply brings about a sense of completeness and finality, rather, where there is life, there is struggle. Martin Heidegger has of course, famously declared Nietzsche to be the culmination of the metaphysical tradition, reading both the Eternal Recurrence and the Will to Power as reversed expressions of a traditional ontology. Johan Figl, too, also describes Nietzsche's use of becoming as a process of substitution (Figl 1982: 73). Read this way, however, change becomes a new, stable 'permanent'. If anything, the world is simply too mysterious, too feminine (i.e. it always dons a mask) to allow for narrow metaphysical categories.

As German as it is to find rules in Reason (e.g. the Categorical Imperative), as English is it to find rules in Nature. If there is a moral to be derived from Nature, it is one that celebrates generosity. Only an Englishman, or to be fair, a nineteenth-century Englishman, would argue that it is scarcity and lack that propels man forward.

But a natural scientist should come out of his human nook; and in nature it is not conditions of distress that are *dominant*, but overflow and squandering, even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for existence is only an *exception*, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power – in accordance with the will to power which is the will to life. (GS 349)

This is a key difference between Nietzsche and Darwin. Nietzsche, for all his sharp words, do not evaluate Nature in harsh terms. Nature is more generous than harsh in the Nietzschean book. Furthermore, Nietzsche – who, after all, grew up in nineteenth-century Germany, where *history* dominated

everything – simply did not see evolution as such an earth-shattering fact, but simply one more episode in the history of metaphysics.

There are truths which are recognized best by mediocre minds because they are most suited to them, there are truths which possess charm and seductive powers only for mediocre spirits one is brought up against this perhaps disagreeable proposition just at the moment because the spirit of respectable but mediocre Englishmen – I name Darwin, John Stuart Mill and Herbert – is starting to gain ascendancy in the midregion of European taste. (*BGE* 257)

Nature is as rich, generous and self-contradictory as Nietzsche's texts, and therefore renders ethical naturalism a virtual impossibility. After all, an ethical naturalist needs an end or some standard in terms of which value can be measured. Lest any residual utilitarianism raises its ugly head, Nietzsche assures us that 'well-being as you understand it – that seems to us no goal, that is an end, a state which soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible – which makes it *desirable* that he should perish' (*BGE* 225). Endless becoming means that value is immeasurable, and that nature gives us no ethics. Instead, 'becoming should be explained without recourse to final intention, becoming must appear justified at every moment or incapable of being evaluated; which amounts to the same thing (*WP* 708). This makes ethical naturalism, particularly the Darwinian version espoused by Richard Dawkins, difficult to maintain. Even if altruism should be proven to have Darwinian origins (Dawkins 2007: 251), there is no reason why we should *follow* the 'rule of nature'. In addition, Nietzsche speculates upon the 'order of rank' (*BGE* 228) among human values, holding that legislation values is what ultimately makes us human.

Notes

- ^{1.} See Ansell-Pearson, K. *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 85) for more.
- ^{2.} See also *Twilight of the Idols*, section 37.

Chapter 6

The Impossible John Stuart Mill

Utilitarianism is, from the Nietzschean perspective, no philosophy, but imperial bureaucracy put into theory. Like many philosophical forms that appear late in history, it is ultimately *primitive*. That is to say, it exhibits an abominable lack of style, as if no human standards were set at all, but only a slavish copying of ‘Nature’ occurred. This is probably why Nietzsche refers to Mill in *Twilight of the Idols* as one of his ‘impossible’ ones: ‘John Stuart Mill: or insulting clarity’. He clearly had no appreciation for Mill’s style – a serious charge.

Consider, for example, the indefatigable, inevitable English utilitarians and with what clumsy and worthy feet they walk, stalk (a Homeric metaphor says it more plainly) along in the footsteps of Bentham. No new idea, no subtle expression or turn of an old idea, not even a real history of what had been thought before: an impossible literature altogether, unless one knows how to leaven it with a little malice. (*BGE* 228)

The utilitarian tradition demonstrates a great *contempt* for man by needlessly relegating him to the animal domain by referring to the immediate sensations of pain and pleasure as the ultimate standards of good and evil. It is hard to think of any philosophical action more basic than this: ‘Initially, we organic beings have no interest in a thing, other than in its relationship to us with regard to pleasure and pain’ (*HAH* 18). With his famous identification of the good with pleasure, Mill joins a long line of philosophical abdicators who lacked the strength to give style to their existence.

John Stuart Mill in many ways embodies everything Nietzsche targeted: not only his specific utilitarian principles with their benign aim of collective happiness, but the plebeian nature of morality itself. What Nietzsche tries to do is to show what has hitherto passed for morality as such, is only a particular version of it, and not the best one man is capable of, either. Nietzsche’s confrontation with Mill, even if the latter is seldom explicitly

named, is where his philosophy is at its most explicit and its most untimely. For Nietzsche, there is a far greater form of justice to aspire to than mere equality or happiness for all, and that is to cultivate a form of humanity that reaches the zenith of its potential. Nietzsche even goes as far as to proclaim the dominant philosophical tradition of his age's strongest imperial power, England, in fact to be shallow, plebeian and *other* to Europe's grander traditions: 'Man does not strive for happiness, only the Englishman does' (*TI*, 'Maxims and Arrows', 12).

What makes Mill particularly naïve, is that he employs an economic model in order to relieve the *angst*-ridden subject of his age of his burdens, while that very subject has already been formed by just such a process. This is why Nietzsche condemns Mill so harshly in *WP* 926:

Against John Stuart Mill. I abhor the man's vulgarity, which says: 'What is right for the one is fair for another'; 'what you would not, etc. do not unto others', which wants to establish all human intercourse on the basis of mutual services, so that every action appears as a kind of payment for something done to us. The supposition here is ignoble in the lowest sense: here is an equivalence of value between my actions and yours is presupposed; here the most personal value of an action is simply annulled – that which cannot be balanced or paid in any way. (*WP* 926)

Mill shares something with Nietzsche in his passionate defense of the individual and his liberty, but failed to reflect upon what the concept of 'individual' really *means*. The model of individualism he upholds is hopelessly derivative and determined by language and history. Besides, a subject born in pain can hardly hope to live according to an ethic based upon its avoidance. The individual is an effect, and not a cause of human thought and action, and can for this reason not be taken as an axis for developing a philosophy of freedom. That said, Nietzsche, as well as the tradition that followed in his wake after his posthumous migration to France, sometimes fail to acknowledge Mill's sensitivity to history and the correspondences between liberal self-determination and Nietzsche's enigmatic *Übermensch*. Both thinkers value personal self-development for its own sake very highly, but where Mill expresses this in terms of a limited platform, Nietzsche presents us with a wide aesthetic stage.

What makes Nietzsche such a remarkable – and even today still controversial – thinker is that he cuts through the Gordian knot of moralism that has plagued modernity ever since its inception. He is the only thinker to reverse the relationship between morality and life: instead of deriding life

from the perspective of an eternally dissatisfied moral ideal, he began to observe morality from the perspective of an eternally *unimprovable* life, bringing all utopian ideals to a drastic halt.

Mill is the apotheosis of a long-standing anti-tragic tradition that developed in the West with Christianity, but reached particular strength in England. This tradition departs from a position that takes pain – its mere existence as well as unfair distribution – as the ultimate philosophical problem. Pain is seen as something *other* to ‘real’ or ‘normal’ existence. This moralistic position, which is especially fierce in its secular form, recognizes in all forms of pain a variation of injustice and derives from it a program for its redress. This tendency would eventually become the basis for every grand narrative that graces, or as the Nietzschean might say, disgraces – the history of modern political philosophy.

From Plato’s idea of the best regime as the one that frees humans from the pain of longing after those earthly goods whose possession can never be guaranteed absolutely and for all, to Locke’s insistence upon the orderly satisfaction of those needs and Marx’s prophecy of socialist revolution as the revolution through which the entire history of human suffering will finally be redeemed, suffering has been posed as a problem to which philosophy and politics must offer some kind of solution. Or at least some kind of *meaning*. Nietzsche reminds us that suffering itself was not man’s problem *per se*, but the sheer meaninglessness that surrounded it was unbearable. As history’s long list of martyrs proved, with a clear goal in mind, man could reconcile himself to suffering surprisingly well, provided that it had a clear purpose.

The suffering itself was not his problem, but rather the fact that he lacked an answer to the question he screamed out, ‘Why this suffering?’ Man, the bravest animal, the one most accustomed to suffering, does not deny suffering in itself. He desires it, he seeks it out in person, provided that people show him a meaning for it, the purpose of suffering. (*GM III*, 28)

According to Nietzsche, morality itself is an interpretation of human vulnerability, be it physiological pain, socio-political conditions or the fundamental character of existence in itself. With the advent of morality, he argues, suffering was given an ‘interpretation’ (*GM III*, 28). The most popular response hitherto – and despite Nietzsche’s valiant efforts, the shadow of this idea is still going strong – has been some or other form of soteriology. As we have seen in the introduction, soteriology is the tale of man’s estrangement from the world as well as the model for his return to immanence. In the case of utilitarianism, soteriology manifests itself in the form

of a precarious balancing act, where pain has to be constantly sidestepped. A radically improved life is possible, according to this doctrine, as long as the correct recipe is followed. There *is* a 'truer' or a more 'real' condition which is the inheritance of those who follow the 'truth'. Utilitarianism is, from a Nietzschean perspective, a particularly unimaginative variation of soteriology, and what is even more problematic, Mill provides but a single standard of the good. John Locke's most important philosophical legacy is in the empiricist tradition, that is, the doctrine that holds that both human knowledge – epistemologically speaking – and behaviour – psychologically speaking – can be explained through the senses and in which the rules of conduct claim the validity of generalizations from experience. It soon became obvious, however, that natural rights, that is, the indefeasible claims to liberty of action inherent in human beings without reference to their social relationships, could not be verified in this way. Nor could they pass unchallenged as axioms after his refutation of innate ideas. This is why Locke's successors in the nineteenth century, following his suggestions in the *Essay*, were bound to develop theories of behaviour in terms of pleasure and pain. It echoed the foundational mechanistic tradition: pleasure operated in terms of attraction, and pain as repulsion. The result was a theory in which the greatest net sum, after deducting the pain as negative quantities, was set up as the socially valuable end of conduct. The classic definition of utilitarianism states that the human good basically consists of the experience of happiness or pleasure, and that pleasure is the greatest good itself. Mill in particular famously holds that the principle of utility is the highest, or the most foundational principle of morality. It plays the role of justifying all moral obligations, and all other moral principles are predicated upon it. He writes that

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or The Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they promote the reverse of happiness (Mill 1963: *The Case of Wagner* (CW) X, 'Utilitarianism': 257).¹

The principle of utility is clearly advanced as a principle of the *good*, and it forms the basis for all practical reasoning: 'The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable as an end; all other things being only desirable as a means to that end' (Mill 1963: CW X, 'Utilitarianism': 210).

Just as the nineteenth century only began in the 1830s, it only truly came to an end in 1945. Victorian metanarratives can best be described by

turning to the terminology not of a philosopher – it is, after all, England that we are talking about – but to a man of industry, William Lovett, cabinet maker, publisher and radical political activist, the Lyotard of the nineteenth century. The title of his book describes it neatly: *The Pursuit of Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* were the broad cultural narratives that legitimized the *fin de siècle* pursuit of individuation and the maximization of individual choice through a free market economy. The pursuit of ‘Bread’ indicates the attempt to gain freedom from nature and scarcity through the acquisition of material well-being. The theme of establishing security through wealth has been a constant one in English political life since its inception in the seventeenth century, and continues to animate British politics today. Mill, like Bentham, links the increase of general welfare, and its chief ingredient, security, with the extension of basic rights and the reduction of economic inequality.

We hold with Bentham, that equality, although not the sole end, is one of the ends of good social arrangements, and that a system of institutions which does not make the scale tip in favour of equality, whenever this can be done without impairing the security of the property which is the product of personal exertion, is essentially a bad government – a government for the few, to the injury of the many. (Mill: 1963: CWXX, ‘*Vindication of the French Revolution of 1848*’: 354)

So much for Bread. The second element of the Victorian holy trinity, the discourse of ‘Knowledge’, was no less paradoxical and deeply intertwined with the first. Taking the bourgeois economical practice into account, it makes sense that the individual subject came to occupy centre stage from the Romantic era onwards. However, the more the panoptic subject takes the world under its sway (it is no accident that a power strategy like Bentham’s Panopticon should make its appearance in this era) the more it begins to cut the world to suit its own needs. This line of thought can be described as an ‘optimistic’ or ‘democratic’ form of empiricism, a concept that can be fruitfully elucidated by referring to the third element of the Victorian master discourse, ‘Freedom’, is firmly aligned with the second. There can be no freedom without knowledge – an idea, as we have seen, that goes back to the Renaissance and thinkers like Bacon. Mill describes freedom obtained through the cultivation of knowledge in terms typical of the tradition of negative freedom: an escape from limiting ‘moulds’, ‘patterns’, ‘restrictions’ and ‘restraint’ (Mill 1963: CWXVIII, ‘*On Liberty*’: 265–267). And: ‘Let any man call to mind what he himself felt on emerging

from boyhood and entering upon the responsibilities of manhood. Was it not like the physical effect of taking off a heavy weight, or releasing him from obstructive, even if not otherwise painful bonds?’ (Mill 1963: *CW* XXI, ‘*On the Subjection of Women*’: 337) The project of emancipation that can be described as the defining characteristic of modernity, entails viewing philosophy as a science of reality in its truth and totality. The totality of reality is nature, and this can be known only through sense-perception, meaning there is no ‘privileged’, innate access to truth. As Foucault later emphasized, however, as knowledge has increased, so have the opportunities to dominate and exercise power multiplied. This is why the search for ‘knowledge’ is by no means clearly a noble endeavour, but could be seen as the enterprise of a resentful slave. In the second *UM*, Nietzsche demonstrates that the mere acquisition of facts is not in itself automatically an inspiring activity, but could be the action of a life-denying ascetic. The mere search for knowledge is not valuable in itself, but can become the substitute activity for those afraid to live, act and legislate in the world. ‘Knowledge can allow as motives only pleasure and pain, utility and injury’ (*HAH* 1340). It is up to the truly free to use acquired knowledge in order to give style to their existence.

The bias towards simplicity in theory is a very English tradition, one that stretches as far back as Ockham’s nominalism, and it meshes well with success of the bourgeois, who by the 1830s were firmly established and thoroughly aware of their power and, for the first half of the nineteenth century at least, firmly upheld Shaftesbury’s vision of the liberal polity, of *sensus communis* and an ethos of ‘judging for yourself’. For this class, abstract rationalism of the type to be found on the Continent served as justification for some of the worst excesses of the commonwealth; a robust empiricism went well with the bourgeois contempt for metaphysical abstraction as did utilitarianism with an increasing domestic sensibility. Seeing that intuitionist views like those of Whewell, then master of Trinity College, could be used to justify both repression in politics and superstition in religion, Mill emphasized the importance of the demonstrability of truth. According to the utilitarians, following in Locke’s footsteps, any truth, be it ethical or logical or theological, should be verifiable or else be consigned to the flames. For Mill, there was also an important social dimension to empiricism: any person’s experience is as good as the next person’s, so it is possible for every individual to rely on his own sense experience, instead of on some external authority. So far, Nietzsche would not necessarily have a problem. Although the model for virtuous and civilized conduct was still the spontaneous virtue of gentility, there was an increasing awareness of

the importance of the freedom and circulation of opinion, which Mill famously summarized in his *On Liberty* of 1859:

We have now recognized the necessity of the mental well-being of mankind (on which all their other well-being depends) of freedom of opinion on four distinct grounds. . . .

First, if any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.

Secondly, even though the suppressed opinion be an error, it may, and commonly does, contain a portion of truth, and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.

Thirdly, even if the received opinion be not only true but the whole truth, unless it is suffered to be, and actually is, vigorously and earnestly contested, it will, by most of those who receive it, be held in the manner of a prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds. And not only this, but fourthly, the meaning of the doctrine itself will be in danger of being lost or enfeebled, and deprived of its vital effect on character and conduct: the dogma becoming a mere profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience. (Mill 1975: 65)

Although Mill appears to exhibit an important Nietzschean insight in his fourth ground, there is a fundamental difference between the two thinkers in that the exercise of freedom of speech is for Mill a means to protect Truth, whereas for Nietzsche, a glorious agonal play is an aim in its own right. Furthermore, for Mill, the subject, with its accompanying rights, comes readily formed with a concomitant obligation on the part of the state to protect it. Historically, liberal theories have conceived the self in strong metaphysical terms. The human subject, as ‘anchor’ of liberalism, was seen as possessing an underlying and determinate nature – a deep core of being – that is describable either in terms of materialism or idealism. Whether as the transcendental subject of Kantian idealism, or as we shall see, the materialistic *homo economicus* of utilitarian versions, the liberal self has been seen as ontologically prior to both the forms of life and practices of the community to which it belongs, as well as its own autonomously chosen ends. Liberal justice is thus logically wedded to conceptions

of subjectivity and virtue that are untenable in the Nietzschean framework. Or, in its classic version, simply untenable. Michael J. Sandel puts the point as follows: 'For justice to be the first virtue, certain things must be true of us. We must be creatures of a certain kind, related to human circumstance in a particular way. We must stand at a distance from our circumstances, whether as a transcendental subject in the case of Kant, or as the essentially unencumbered subject of possession in the case of Mill. Either way, we must regard ourselves as independent: independent from the interest and attachments we may have at any moment, never identified by our aims, but always capable of standing back to survey and assess and possibly to revise them' (Sandel 1982: 175). Even a form of liberalism that is prepared to 'revise' itself, however, would for Nietzsche still belong in the realm of reactive values. The form of subjectivity associated with modernity and concomitantly, liberal justice, is sufficiently problematical to justify a philosophical annihilation. The substantiality and 'unity' of this supposed entity presupposes that it is essentially immutable and thus *ahistorical*. Despite paying lip-service to 'change' and 'progress' an entity is implied that does not become what it is through some contingent developmental process; in other words, the human subject is viewed as a given entity incapable of growth, change and development. This is the kind of imaginative fiction that bespeaks a deep-set resentment against the world, its change and all its contradictions, and a moral world in which justice can only be thought of in the narrow terms of bourgeois rights. There are two basic rights that form the basis of Millian justice: the right to security, and the right to liberty (including the liberty of self-development). Mill describes rights as claims that are socially guaranteed by institutions collectively set up and maintained to carry out these claims most effectively (Mill 1963: *CWX*, 'Utilitarianism': 251). These are not in conflict with utilitarian principles, for like utilitarianism itself, the rules of justice must be based upon well-being.

While I dispute the claims of any theory which sets up an imaginary standard of justice not grounded in utility, I account the justice which is grounded on utility to be the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding part, of all morality. Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules which concern the essentials of human well-being more nearly, and are therefore of more absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life. (Mill 1963: *CWX*, 'Utilitarianism': 255)

Any form of social contract thus depends upon a shared belief in the similarity of the powers of the participants in the power sphere. This goes for

the rights and duties of nations as well as individual human agents. While this conception of justice is inexorable in the modern liberal state (it can perhaps be termed a necessary evil) it is important to realize that our conception of justice does not have to *end* here. Whereas basic equality is for liberals (and Englishmen, shopkeepers, etc.) a final end, it represents for Nietzsche but one *moment*, or one element in the play of worldly justice, and can therefore not be taken as a final ideal or the embodiment of virtue. An important part of Nietzsche's deconstructive strategy *avant la lettre* is the hunting down of reductionisms. All metaphysical forms are reductions, a violation of unacknowledged elements and changes that occur over time. What makes apparent positions of 'equality' in the legal and political spheres interesting from a Nietzschean perspective is that they are results of a long, usually unacknowledged struggle, the will to power that now finds itself at rest. Or to put it in more Nietzschean idiom, these temporary stable 'platforms' that occur from time to time is the will to power donning a calm and peaceful mask instead of presenting itself in its usual violent form. This means that the rule of law is the *exception* rather than the rule.

We must acknowledge something even more alarming – the fact that from the highest biological standpoint, conditions of law must always be exceptional conditions, partial restrictions on the basic will to live, which is set on power – they are subordinate to the total purpose of this will as its individual means, that is, as means to create a larger unit of power. (GMII, 11)

What is important to note here, is that while rights and duties exist only between equals, positions or situations in which genuine equality exists are comparatively rare. It should also be noted that in these cases, justice is simply a *characteristic* of the relationships involved that manifests itself in the interactions of the parties involved; it is already there as an aesthetic dimension; justice cannot be strived for. Instead, those who demand equality commit violence against the complexity of the world, and the operation of a greater cosmic justice, the will to power. The rest of WP 925, '*Against John Stuart Mill*' reads:

'Reciprocity' is a piece of gross vulgarity; precisely that something I do may not and could not be done by another, that no balance is possible (– except in the most select sphere of 'my equals', *inter pares* –), that in a deeper sense one never gives back, because one is something unique and does only unique things – this fundamental conviction contains the

cause of aristocratic segregation from the masses, because the masses believe in 'equality' and *consequently* in equivalence and 'reciprocity'.

Only rarely is it possible to speak of a genuine justice *inter pares* (GM II, 11), that rare Homeric virtue that existed largely upon the agonal stage or the ancient battlefield. To speak of 'equality' as an ideal is to deny at the same time the perspectival nature of our judgements, because the terms according to which 'equality' is determined is not only a slavish *perspective*, but set in terms of only a select *number* of individuals. Not even all slaves necessarily demand equality. Little wonder then, that Zarathustra distances himself so violently from this conception of justice:

Thus do I speak unto you in parable, ye who make the soul giddy, ye preachers of equality Tarantulas are ye unto me, and secretly revengeful ones!

Therefore do I tear at your web, that your rage may lure you out of your den of lies, and that your revenge may leap forth from behind your word 'justice'.

Because, for man to be redeemed from revenge – that is for me the bridge to the highest hope, and a rainbow after long storms.

Otherwise, however, would the tarantulas have it. 'Let it be very justice for the world to become full of the storms of our vengeance' – thus do they talk to one another.

'Vengeance will we use, and insult, against all who are not like us' – thus do the tarantula-hearts pledge themselves.

And 'Will to Equality' – that itself shall henceforth be the name of virtue; and against all that hath power will we raise an outcry!

Ye preachers of equality, the tyrant-frenzy of impotence crieth thus in you for 'equality': your most secret tyrant-longings disguise themselves thus in virtue-words!

In all their lamentations soundeth vengeance, in all their eulogies is maleficence; and being judge seemeth to them bliss. (Z II, 'Of the Tarantulas')

To take equality as the *telos* for a just society, is strictly speaking, a contradiction in terms. The need for justice arose precisely because there *is* no such thing as 'natural' justice. 'Nature' is a complex network of radically unequal relationships that are for the most part maintained through violence. It cannot survive without violence and inequality – equality would entail stasis and eventually death. This is why it makes no sense to hold certain parties accountable for the circle of violence that *is* life. For Nietzsche,

it makes no sense to condemn immorality in the name of morality, because the moral flows from the immoral – it is unavoidable.

Life is *essentially* appropriation, injury, overpowering of what is alien and weaker, suppression, hardness, imposition of one's own forms, incorporation, and at its mildest, exploitation – but why should one always use those words in which a slanderous intent has been imprinted for ages? 'Exploitation' belongs to the essence of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is the consequence of what lives as a basic organic function; it is the consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to live. (BGE 259)

Mill appears to be oblivious to the *need* for violence in order to maintain life. In expanding upon his Great Happiness Principle, he states explicitly: 'By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, the absence of pain and the privation of pleasure'. Mill's theory of life is founded upon a theory of life that holds that

Pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain. (Mill 1963: CWX, 'Utilitarianism': 210)

Mill exhibits the old English flaw of philosophical synecdoche: part of the problem is mistaken for the problem in its entirety. In his case in particular, he mistakes the problem of pain as the total of all philosophical problems. And because it is an English problem, it must be the world's. Utilitarianism is also a philosophy of the Empire: 'Ultimately they all want English morality to prevail: inasmuch as mankind, or the "general utility", or "the happiness of the greatest number", no! the happiness of *England* would best be served' (BGE 228).

Consider too, WP925:

Marginal note on a *naisserie anglaise*. 'Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you'. That counts as wisdom; that counts as prudence; that counts as the basis for morality – as the 'golden rule'. John Stuart Mill believes in it (and what Englishman does not?). But this rule does not brook the slightest attack. The calculation 'do nothing that ought not to be done to you' prohibited actions on account of their harmful circumstances; the concealed premise is that an action will always be

required. But what if someone holding the *Principe*² in his hand were to say: 'It is precisely such actions that one *must* perform, to prevent others from performing them first – to deprive others of the opportunity to perform them on us? (WP925)

As the quote demonstrates, whoever defines the moral good purely in terms of pain and pleasure has only scratched the surface of the human being. Had Mill – who died a mere 15 years before Jack the Ripper's reign of terror in the East End – scratched a little deeper, he may have found, like Dostoyevsky in his own age, and Freud a little later – that pleasure, like truth, is never pure, and rarely simple. Neither is the subject that is the bearer of the desire for pleasure or pain: as we have seen in Chapter 3, the subject is made, not born. And pain plays a decisive role in this. Before man could become the subject that Mill writes about, he had to become *calculable*, and how this occurred, is anything but a bedtime story. First of all, while Hobbes had perhaps an inkling as to the violent economy that constitutes subjectivity, Locke and Mill seem to forget that man did not appear ready-made in nature with the ability to understand time and to honour contracts. For Nietzsche, the proper analysis of morality requires that it be articulated within a temporal framework of past and current costs and future benefits. The value of any kind of good concerns its effect on human futurity. And futurity is not simply given to humanity. Futurity does not simply flow from an objective temporal order. It must be *earned*, or conquered; it does not precede humanity. Its attainment is linked in crucial ways to the development of human nature 'before history', before the ancient conflict between masters and slaves delineated in the First Essay.

The most disquieting notion of all Nietzsche's subversive techniques is his account of how man's relationship with time is *earned*, namely through cruelty. 'Man is the cruelest animal' Nietzsche infamously states through Zarathustra: 'Whatever is most evil is his best power and the hardest stone for the highest creator' (Z, 'On the Higher Men'). Moreover, on the crux of the Second Essay of the *Genealogy* in *EH*: 'Cruelty is here exposed for the first time as one of the most ancient and basic substrata of culture that simply cannot be reasoned away.' This conviction takes shape gradually through Nietzsche's work and grew from the conviction that the purity and beauty of ancient Greece emerged only after a long 'comfortless period of dark crudity and cruelty'. He adds: 'One can speak of spring only when there has been a winter that preceded it.' Nietzsche thus proposes that we should not regard the infliction of pain simply as evil. When

pleasure accompanies the infliction of evil – when one strongly *feels* the joy of stretching one's power to the limits – 'it occurs for the well-being of the individual. . . . Without pleasure no life, the struggle for pleasure is the struggle for life. Whether an individual pursues this struggle in such a way that people call him good, or in such a way that people call him evil, is determined by the degree and quality of his intellect' (*GM* II, 5). Furthermore: 'love and cruelty are not opposites: in the noblest natures they are deeply intertwined' (Aphorism 5866, *NL* Spring–Autumn 1881). This is a recurring theme in Nietzsche: 'Happiness and unhappiness are sisters' (*GS* 390). It is either both, or neither.

Nietzsche sees the intertwined *folie à deux* of pleasure and pain as essential to the exercise of the will to power. To exercise this will inevitably imply the courting of cruelty, but even more, the positive *enjoyment* of the pain and agony that suffering causes. 'To practice cruelty is to enjoy the *highest*' (*D* 30), that is to say, 'the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing, and formative powers' (*GM* II, 12) that are the essence of life.

Nietzsche contends that at first, these pleasures were public. Cruelty is one of the oldest festive joys of mankind.

It is not long since princely weddings and public festivals of the more magnificent types were unthinkable without executions, torturing, and perhaps an *auto da fe*,³ and no noble household was complete without a creature upon whom one could heedlessly vent one's malice and cruel jokes.⁴ (*D* 18)

For millennia, societies have been organized hierarchically and allowed the man with prestige to enjoy the cruel pleasure of exciting envy and permitting him to 'vent his power freely upon the powerless, the voluptuous pleasure '*de faire mal pour la plaisir de le faire*' (*GM* II, 11). It was through these displays that memory was created, and with it, the spheres of legal obligation and morality were first brought into existence. 'A thing must be burnt in so that it stays in the memory: only something that continues to hurt stays in the memory – that is a proposition from the oldest, and unfortunately, the longest-lived psychology on earth' (*GM* II, 15).

This psychology by far predates, and implies the apparently mild commercial ethic of Mill's bourgeois subject. The very existence of his commercial vocabulary – the 'reciprocity' that Nietzsche hates so much – is a remainder from the days of blood sport. Indeed, Mill's subject of reciprocal obligations would not be possible without the mnemotechnics identified by

Nietzsche. There is nothing 'natural' about any of Mill's presuppositions, but his gentlemanly subject in particular is what Aristotle called a *para physin*, something unnatural (though he was speaking of nature's tendency to produce monsters something beyond or in excess of nature).

Nietzsche locates the primordial or mythical origins of culture in this ability to keep one's word, to propel into the future an avowal made in the past or present. This ability is an achievement, the result of considerable long-term prehistoric investment. Prehistoric in this context refers to the long period of 'pre-history, when the *real* work on man was done: "the essential work of a man on his own self in the longest-lasting age of the human race, his entire pre-historical work, derives its meaning, its grand justification, from the following point, no matter how much hardship, tyranny, monotony and idiocy it also manifested: with the help of the morality of custom and the social strait jacket, the human being was rendered truly predictable"' (GM II, 1). For a long time forgetfulness has wrongly been regarded as mere inactivity or mental passivity. However, it is much more – a positive forming force and a power of inhibition or repression (*positives Hemmungsvermögen*) which is responsible for the fact that what is experienced and absorbed enters consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) to such a small extent while we are digesting it. Forgetting is not simply a matter of wish repression as Freud supposed, it is the inhibition of consciousness, its arrested development. Forgetting consists, as the cow-observer from the opening of UM II will testify, in the immediate consummation of pleasure and the instantaneous gratification of desire. In this respect, forgetting resembles Freud's pleasure principle. Forgetting is what happens when bodily drives discharge themselves freely, directly and without delay in response to excitations received from the outside. Forgetting is so essential to shaping ideas and thoughts that it is indispensable to any writer: 'Good memory. – Many a man fails as an original thinker simply because his memory is too good' (HAH 140).

Unrelenting suffering and pain were among the tools used to create the first economic relationship. In GM II, section 5, the reader is told that it was in the debtor–creditor relationship that promises were first made, where a memory had to be created for those who promised. To inspire trust in his promise to repay, and to impress the duty of repayment upon his conscience as a very real duty, the debtor made a pact with his creditor and pledged something in the stead of his debt, should he forfeit upon his payment. It had to be something he had control over, such as his body, often his freedom – slavery or debtor's prison – and sometimes his life. The duty of repayment thus operates as a kind of regulative principle between

different units of power. In time, this violent form of exchange, which *includes* the utilitarian logic of measuring happiness against happiness or pleasure against absence of pain, became a collective unconscious, a common symbolic logic. Mill is simply skimming the surface, as any latecomer in history would do, unless he is prepared to engage in a thorough genealogical analysis.

Like all the values created within it, society itself had its birth in an economy of violence. Members of the first communities, as they do in contemporary societies, learned to observe imperatives based on costs and benefits. The benefit is obviously security, the cost the possibility of merciless violence being turned upon the individual who is perceived as a threat to their security. Nietzsche holds this violence to be justifiable, for out of this autochthonous violence comes the possibility for human futurity. The ability to make promises implies nothing less than having control over the future.

In time, the obvious violent exchanges became meek economic exchanges, but not without man having to pay the price for becoming 'civilized'. Taming, 'civilizing', for Nietzsche, implies what he calls 'internalization', an idea that in a post-Freudian age, seems deceptively obvious: 'all instincts that do not discharge themselves outwardly turn inward'. Nietzsche states: 'Thus it was that man first developed what was later called his "soul"' (*GM* II, 15). The invention of the soul, as we have seen, divides the human animal, pushes back its instinct for freedom, and finally able to discharge and vent itself only on itself, the organism declares war on itself. Nietzsche describes the inner *agon* as follows:

the man who, from lack of external enemies and resistances and forcibly confined to the oppressive narrowness and punctiliousness of custom impatiently lacerated, persecuted, gnawed at, assaulted and maltreated himself. . . . This yearning and desperate prisoner became the inventor of bad conscience. (*GM* II, 15)

In time, the human being, suing for peace, comes to swear allegiance to a new kind of psychological 'oligarchy' 'with regulation, foresight and premeditation' keeping at bay our 'underworld of utility organs working with and against one another' (*GM* II, 16). With the aid of the morality of mores and the social strait-jacket that accompanies it, the organism's oligarchy is kept in power, and man learns to be 'ashamed of his instincts'. Stifling his cruel and murderous impulses, he becomes 'calculable, regular, automatic [*notwendig*] even in his own self-image' (*GM* II, 16) – a subject of civilized reason and morality, Mill's subject.

However, the now more developed organism did not lose his impulses for cruelty. What might otherwise be inexplicable – the pleasure men have apparently taken in the pains that accompanied the process of learning to rule themselves – Nietzsche explains through the survival of internalized cruelty and the paradoxical mixture of pain and pleasure that characterizes it. The horrific oxymoron of self-torture becomes the key to interpret a number of intertwined phenomena in *GM*: the bad conscience, guilt, and above all, the asceticism of Christianity. The process of internalization cripples man's animal instincts; shared taboos make the exercise of the will to power difficult and sometimes even impossible. At the same time, in some rare souls, the masochistic pleasures of self-rule somehow strengthen the will to power in all its cruel splendour – the old animal instincts cultivated with foresight and transfigured through the use of memory, imagination and reason erupt in new forms of mastery:

[T]his secret self-ravishment, this artist's cruelty, this delight in imposing a form upon oneself as a hard, recalcitrant suffering material, and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a No into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes it suffer, out of joy in making suffer – eventually the entire *active* bad conscience – you will have guessed it – as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to life an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself. (*GM* II, 18)

And

Almost everything we call 'higher culture' is based on the spiritualization and intensification of cruelty – this is my proposition; the 'wild beast' has not been laid to rest at all, it lives, it flourishes, it has merely become – deified. That which constitutes the painful voluptuousness of tragedy is cruelty; that which produces a pleasing effect in so-called tragic pity, indeed fundamentally in everything sublime up to the highest and most refined thrills of metaphysics, derives its sweetness solely from the ingredient of cruelty mixed in with it. (*BGE* 229)

Nietzsche agrees with Mill that our needs determine our values. For him, needs simply stretch further than the need for pleasure or the fear of pain.

It is our needs *that interpret the world*; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that would like to compel all the other drives to accept as norm. (*WP* 481)

As we have seen however, it might be better to sometimes refrain from asking *what exactly* these needs demand. We are determined to such an extent by our needs, that to suggest that they *should* form the basis of our morals is nothing short of a tautology. They already do.

There is a great irony to be found in the fact that pain is exacerbated in the very attempt to eliminate it. The Judeo-Christian slave interpretation of morality is but one interpretation of suffering – more precisely, a misinterpretation. It is a misinterpretation of the weak, who, unable to leave their mark upon the world, believe that their weaknesses are actually virtues, the results of rational choice rather than shortcomings on their part. Unable to distinguish themselves, they turn uniformity into a virtue and insist upon imposing it on everyone: this is how the slave *mentality* creates the herd. The values of the herd are created by reversing the values of the master, who favours values like strength and distinction over meekness and uniformity.

It appears to make suffering and injustice more meaningful and hence tolerable, but at the same time, moral interpretations of suffering compounds suffering in that it occasions the suffering associated with *resentment*, guilt, asceticism and eventually nihilism. After the advent of the latter, pain is so much harder to bear. This moral code, Nietzsche writes, ‘combats only the suffering, the discomfiture of the sufferer, not the real sickness’ (*GM* III, 17). Besides, there is hardly anything more inhumane than having to live in a world almost completely determined by economic rules, where everything can and must be *paid* for.

While the avoidance of pain may have its merits as an ideal for thinkers who live after Auschwitz, it is insufficient as an *ideal*. For the weak, the avoidance of pain is the means for protecting life; both pain and pleasure are however, such a part of life that to use either as the justification for life would amount to a fallacy: the sum cannot be justified by its parts. Pleasure cannot be used to *justify* life: that would make it party to the suit and judge in one.

Mill does not give us any reason as to *why* the human creature should be free from pain. Just because he experiences pain is still no reason why he should not simply bear it, as Hume’s is/ought distinction reminds us. For Nietzsche, comfort is not an aim *worthy* of man: ‘Well-being as you understand it, that is no goal, that seems to us an *end*, a state that soon makes man ridiculous and contemptible’ (*BGE* 225). For all his defence of the body and the earthly, Nietzsche is no vulgar hedonist; as shown in Chapter 8, he was far too classical to stand for crude excess.

Nietzschean cruelty is not ‘bestial’ or merely sadistic; the Nietzschean ‘sadist’ is not a psychopath or by any means a ‘pathological’ creature.

Cruelty is instead a form of release from pain, a way in which the human being copes with suffering. Nietzsche's real objection to cruelty is its abuse in the moralizing context. Cruelty, as a form of violent differentiation, an artist's weapon of form-giving, has a certain limited legitimacy. Without it, man may never reach what he is truly capable of, and in the Nietzschean framework, there is nothing more terrible than this.

What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the 'good', likewise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living *at the expense* of the future? Perhaps more comfortably, less dangerously, but at the same time in a *meaner style*, more basely? – so that precisely morality would be to blame if the *highest power* and splendor possible to man was in fact never attained? So that precisely morality was in the danger of dangers? (BT, 'Attempt at a Self-Criticism', 5)

For Nietzsche, if pain is a prerequisite for greatness, it is a price he is willing to pay: 'Terribleness is part of greatness, let us not deceive ourselves' (WP 1028). In his world, the infliction of pain is assigned a positive and productive power; it is a tool or plastic force that gives shape to reality and therefore sets the creative drives free. For Nietzsche, suffering is not merely an emotional experience, but conflicting plastic forces, the will to power, or life itself that goes through all individuals like a common current. Cruelty serves suffering like an artistic instrument which emancipates its forces into images and deeds, values, virtues and laws. It is man's most primitive instrument of interpretation, the most elemental *artistic* aid used to construct definite points of value and desire, for example, social values. It is during the spectacle of cruelty that *measuring* happens, through watching the event of suffering, equivalences are contrived, values established, and man's future is determined. Utility pales as an evaluative criterion when put into the company of Nietzschean standards.

[T]hey would like with all their might to prove to themselves that to strive after English happiness, I mean after comfort and fashion (and, as the supreme goal, a seat in Parliament), is at the same time the true path of virtue, indeed that all virtue there has ever been on earth has consisted in just such a striving. Not one of all these ponderous herd animals with their uneasy conscience (who undertake to advocate the cause of egoism as the cause of the general welfare –) wants to know or scent that the 'general welfare' is not an ideal, or a goal, or a concept that can be grasped at all, but only an emetic – that what is right for one cannot by

any means therefore be right for another, that the demand for one morality for all is detrimental to precisely the higher men, in short that there exists an order of rank between man and man, consequently also between morality and morality. They are a modest and thoroughly mediocre species of man, these English utilitarians, and, as aforesaid, in so far as they are boring one cannot think sufficiently highly of their utility. One ought even to encourage them: which is in part the objective of the following rhymes:

Hail, continual plodders, hail!
 'Lengthen out the tedious tale',
 Pedant still in head and knee,
 Dull, of humour not a trace,
 Permanently commonplace,
sans génie et sans esprit! (BGE 228)

Indeed, not only does Nietzsche believe pain to play an important part in the life of both a healthy individual and a healthy culture, but at times he suggests that sickness, too, is a necessary prerequisite for genuine health. Traditionally, health is defined negatively and simply as the absence of sickness: the individual is well if nothing is wrong with him. Health is thus understood in the sense of Lockean freedom: the absence of obstacles is the 'neutral' or 'natural' position. Health according to this position is thus a neutral condition, a golden mean achieved by moderation and the absence of excess. In contrast to this view, sickness can (although it might not necessarily be the case) act as a stimulant to great health, providing both a target to overcome to an even healthier end and something against which the condition of health can be measured and identified. Writing in the preface to the second edition of *GS* Nietzsche says:

Noble and common. Common natures consider all noble, magnanimous feelings inexpedient and therefore first of all incredible. They blink when they hear of such things and seem to feel like saying: 'Surely there must be some advantage involved; one cannot see through everything'. They are suspicious of the noble person as if he surreptitiously sought his advantage. (*GS*, Preface, 3)

It is here where Nietzsche's radical *otherness* to the tradition shines through. Despite all the attempts at politically correct 'rehabilitations' – there is a Nietzsche for almost everything these days: a feminist Nietzsche,

a pluralist Nietzsche, a harmless aesthete, the ubiquitous ‘Nietzsche for the Other’ – Nietzsche is an unabashed elitist, possibly the only thinker to consider fully the implications of modernity’s hysterical drive to egalitarianism. Nietzsche’s notion of justice is an aesthetic one: for him, justice is served when man reaches the full extent of his potential. If there is to be a single theme to his works – a position that no Nietzsche scholar would defend these days – it is that he is a robust defender of *quality*, and a bitter opponent of mediocrity in any form. This is not up for debate; this was the one great purpose of Nietzsche’s lifelong endeavour. In every Nietzschean text there is a joyful admiration of the strong, the stylish and the courageous, and a healthy enjoyment of the joys of an energizing conflict. In *BGE* 62, he chastises the ‘Christian’ ethos of his time for its apparent purpose to ‘smash the strong, contaminate great hopes, cast suspicion on joy in beauty, break down everything autocratic, manly, conquering, tyrannical, all the instincts proper to the highest and most successful of the type “man”, into uncertainty, remorse of conscience, self-destruction’. The same passage states unambiguously that it ‘worsens the European race’. In a note from 1888, he says

Whoever reflects upon the way in which the type man can be raised to his greatest splendor will grasp first of all that he must place himself outside morality, for morality itself has been essentially directed to the opposite end, to obstruct, or destroy that splendid evolution wherever it has been going on. (*WP* 897)⁵

To give Mill his due – which is something Nietzsche never does – he did regard the aesthetic self-development of man in a serious light.

Intellectual education, and moral education: knowledge and the training of the knowing faculty, conscience and the moral faculty. These are the two main ingredients of human culture; but they do not exhaust the whole of it. There is a third division, which, if subordinate and owing allegiance to the two others, is barely inferior to them, and not less needful to the completeness of the human being; I mean the aesthetic branch; the culture that comes through poetry and art, and may be described as the education of the feelings, and the cultivation of the beautiful. (Mill 1963: *CWXXI*, ‘*Inaugural Address at Saint Andrews*’: 251)

Nietzsche’s first problem would be with the subordination of the aesthetic to the moral, as if the aesthetic is only an afterthought – albeit a very

important afterthought in Mill's case – to a fully formed rational subject with his 'own' idea of the good that only needs a space free from interference in order to develop that idea. This is of course the essence of liberalism. Mill is committed to the most basic tenets of liberalism, namely to the notion that every individual is a free and sovereign being with the right to pursue his or her notion of the good in his or her particular way with the minimum of state interference. Liberalism is of course also committed to pluralism and the idea that every individual is unique and has his or her own conception of what makes life worth the effort. As Herman Siemens points out (2007: 2), pluralism is likewise important for Nietzsche, who celebrates the plurality and richness of life-forms, and diverse expressions of style. So much so that he has Zarathustra refusing disciples: "This is now *my* way – where is yours?" Thus did I answer those who asked me "the way". For *the* way – it doth not exist!" (Z III, 'On the Spirit of Gravity', 2).

However, no idea of the good ever comes into being in isolation. As Bonnie Honig points out,

even the Overman is not as self-sufficient, apart and complete as he is often taken to be. How can the Overman be a *fait accompli*? He must renegotiate his relationship with himself and his past, daily. Constituted by language and other human, all-too human practices and institutions, the Overman is forever faced with the challenge of self-overcoming, continually confronted with new opportunities for *ressentiment* and rage. (1993: 64)

It is, as Chantal Mouffe also points out debatable if one can even speak of plurality when liberalism commits the individual to an isolated private space where the individual never gets the chance to test and shape his opinions in agonal conflict. At best one can speak here of an *impotent* pluralism. As Kant also emphasized, the question of taste is essentially *public*, and aesthetics a matter of disinterestedness. In a private zone *anything* is allowed, and matters of art and quality easily fall into the quagmire of private entertainment. Liberalism, taking a ready-minted self for granted, tends to produce a crude, unshaped, decadent subject that clings to its 'moral worth', ignoring the socio-physiological factors necessary for having a self at all. In note 11 [182] *NL* Spring 1881–Autumn 1882 (KSA 9.509), Nietzsche states that the human being develops through complex self-regulatory processes of internal self-organization and reciprocal exchanges with its environment. These processes include metabolic processes, secretion and excretion, metabolic powers, the power of regeneration and various forms of

conflict. The human being cannot exist without adopting and rejecting, assimilating and transforming elements from the outer world. Without this, there is mere stasis and death. Giving style to one's existence consists of an artful selection of the elements one deems best. In order to achieve any kind of 'grand style' sacrifices have to be made. Style itself, is not all, the experience of sheer power in the process of achieving that style provides greater satisfaction than any utilitarian can understand. Eventually, a world measured only by utilitarian standards will become unbearable: 'You utilitarians, you too love everything *useful* only as a vehicle of your inclinations – you too really find the noise of its wheels intolerable?' (*BGE* 174). This is why Mill, despite his honest appreciation for the Greeks, fails to live up to their standards.

No utilitarians. – 'Power against which much ill is done and meditated is worth more than impotence which encounters only good' – thus the Greeks felt. That is to say: they valued the feeling of power more highly than any sort of utility or good reputation. (*D* 360)

Nietzsche's individualism is a rich one, forever straining against its boundaries, like an overflowing cup spilling its contents. Nietzsche's self by far exceeds Mill's: it demands a playground beyond liberalism – a playground as large as life itself; one that only Shakespeare could match.

Notes

- ¹. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, edited by Robson, J. M. Toronto: Toronto University Press. Henceforth indicated in the text according to the following example: (Mill 1963: *CWX*, '*Utilitarianism*': 201).
- ². Machiavelli's *The Prince* (London: Penguin, 1956).
- ³. The public announcement and execution of the sentence of the Inquisition, with the attendant ceremonies, such as the burning at the stake. Literally translated from the Spanish it means 'act of faith'.
- ⁴. René Girard confirms this thesis by pointing out the importance of the scapegoat in constructing communal unity.
- ⁵. See also *D* 163, *BGE* 212, *GM* III, 14, *EH* IV, 4, *WP* 274, 345, 957.

Chapter 7

How Monsieur George Eliot Added Insult to Injury

For the cynic it may appear that George Eliot could never put a foot right. For her countrymen, Mary Ann Evans was not man enough; for her harshest Teutonic critic, she was not Woman enough. As is the case with most of the English names that appear in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*, Eliot stands as a symbol of what Nietzsche detested: rational morality, scientific truth as a guide for life and realism in art. Ironically, it is not her gender that is the main issue here – although that hardly helps – but the fact that she exhibits the same flaws as the men of her age, namely the tendency to see Truth as something to capture and unmask, instead of a challenging playmate.

I fear that women who have grown old are more skeptical in the secret recesses of their hearts than any of the men; they believe in the superficiality of existence as its essences, and all virtue and profundity is to them only the disguise of this ‘truth’, the very desirable disguising of a *paedelum*, an affair therefore of decency and modesty, and nothing more! (GS 64)

Eliot was apparently not one of them. As a woman, she should have known better than to find truth in science and morality in rationalistic rules. If God is dead, he should have been done away with completely, not chased after in quaint little notions like ‘duty’. For Nietzsche, there is nothing more desperate than an atheist who *wants* to be a believer.

In many ways, Eliot is even more representative of Victorian ideas than Dickens – the latter captured Victorian sentiment, Eliot Victorian *ideas*. As the first shadow of doubt began to creep into Western consciousness, it was hoped that if the world was no longer God’s, perhaps it could be more properly man’s. At first sight, this opened up hitherto inconceivable possibilities for freedom: Hans Blumenberg, for example, views modern ‘self-assertion’ as an active, reconstructive engagement with the world as a fruitful response to the *deus absconditus*. The idea that mankind had been

squandering all their treasures on God, so that now by unbelief they are released for human self-affirmation had its origins in Renaissance secularism, but only became fully explicit in the nineteenth century. Feuerbach personifies this development:

The purpose of my writings is to turn men from theologians into anthropologists, from theophilists into philanthropists, from candidates for the hereafter into students for the here and now, from religious and political lackeys of the heavenly and earthly monarchies into free, self-confident citizens of the world. (Solomon 1988: 107)

Feuerbach's naturalistic humanism, which greatly influenced George Eliot, represents a line of thought more easily reconcilable with the aspirations of the English bourgeois than those of the still mainly feudal Germany, where Hegel's speculative phenomenology dominated more or less until the Second World War.

Nietzsche's great complaint against Eliot – and the realists in general – is their attachment to truth. Realists are far too Hegelian for their own good: 'The Rational is Real, and the Real is Rational'. The problem of knowledge, and how to overcome the problem of relativism, occupied Eliot from her first works to the last. She was no cynical sceptic: although fully aware of Kant's limitations on the possibility of knowledge, she was wise enough to realize that one cannot *live* one's life as a sceptic. '[S]kepticism as we know, can never be thoroughly applied, else life would come to a standstill' she writes in Book 23 of *Middlemarch*. As we have seen in Chapter 4, this is precisely Bertrand Russell's complaint, and as we show in Chapter 10, also the problem that Nietzsche tried to solve through other means.

Eliot was certainly aware of the problem of relativism. Even before she began to write fiction, she recognized that language was not a perfect instrument to make the world transparent. Writing in 1856, even while still under the influence of the ultra positivist *Cours de la philosophie positive*, Eliot comments upon the imperfections of language:

It must be admitted that the language of cultivated nations is in anything but a rational state; the great sections of the civilized world are only approximately intelligible to each; and even that, only at the cost of a long study; one word stands for many things, and many words for one thing. The subtle shades of meaning, and still subtler shades echoes of association, make language an instrument which scarcely anything short of genius can wield with definiteness and certainty. (Pinney 1963: 114)

This is an Eliot that Nietzsche might have respected, except for the fact that the genius too – perhaps especially a genius – would fail at making the world transparent. Nietzsche, as we have seen, would have rejoiced in this. Though Eliot admitted to the limits of language, she was very far from adopting an anti-realist position. She claimed that ‘different groups of human beings, though in the very beginning of their existence sundered from each other, most inevitably fall upon the same devices for communication and analogical representation’ (Collins 1980: 385). Rather than to support an absolute subjectivism, she insisted on *limitations* to human thought, but upholding the ideal of a common truth, an ideal she shared with Ludwig Feuerbach.

Feuerbach’s main claim in *The Essence of Christianity* is that God is fiction, a projection of human needs, and Christianity is not literally true. Feuerbach’s own aim is indeed the ‘uncovering of unveiled, naked truth’ (Feuerbach 1957: xxxiv). One could hardly hope for a more *un-Nietzschean* sentiment! Feuerbach is generally taken to be a weak relativist in the sense that he thinks that although we do not have access to a view outside of the human experience, we are nevertheless not bereft of truth:

It is true that I may have a merely subjective conception, that is, one which does not arise out of the general constitution of my species, but if my conception is determined by the constitution of my species, the distinction between what an object is in itself, and what it is for me ceases; for this conception is itself an absolute one. (Feuerbach 1967: 16)

This is what George Eliot ultimately aimed for, and her admiration for August Comte is reflected in her realist style. However, it is the later Comte, the author of *The System of Positive Polity*, that allows more room for feeling (the ‘affective’) whose influence is clearly to be seen in Eliot’s work. Writing in a time where the function of the novel and its role was still being debated, Eliot saw a strong ethical dimension to the novel. She and George Lewes frequently contributed to the debate: Lewes wrote, for example, that ‘a novel is an exhortation . . . not a demonstration, but it does not the less appeal to our moral sense’ (Lewes 1853: 475, quoted by Levine, G., 2001: 20). Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* develops as a character because she moves from a subjective picture of the world to a more ‘objective’ one. ‘[S]he was no longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusted herself to their clearest perception’ (*Middlemarch*, chapter 37). The idea that the novel is a vehicle for our ethical enrichment is making a comeback again today in the thought of Martha Nussbaum,

who argues persuasively that ethical truths are presentable only in the form of narrative, that can illustrate the particularities, complexities and nuance that accompanies our situatedness. For George Eliot, this went without saying. For her, the capacity for sympathy was essential for the possibility of human agency, because morality consisted in one's ability to transcend solipsism and share another's state of mind. The emphasis on 'sympathy' is clearly derived from Feuerbach, who argues that the qualities traditionally ascribed to God – sympathy, love and benevolence – are qualities innate to humans.

It appears that, for all her artistic complexity, George Eliot is fundamentally an objectivist in ethics. It is not difficult to imagine Nietzschean ire rising at this idea. For Eliot, there are 'independent' moral facts that exist 'objectively' beyond any human perspective. To be moral, behaviour required what Eliot regards as a form of independence, an ability to maintain a sensitivity for 'that sense of others' claims' (*The Mill on the Floss*, VI: 13). Being a nineteenth-century moral theoretician, it should come as no surprise that the *justification* of morality is for her a central problem. Taking her cue from Spencer and Mill, she was open to the goal of founding ethics on science, and altruism is a key concept in her work: both Dorothea Brooke's and Maggie Tulliver's dilemmas derive from a fervent desire not to hurt others. This is then one of the central objections Nietzsche could raise to the 'little moralistic female', namely that she took the goodness of sympathy and the virtue of pity for granted, leaving her no other option but to defend it upon intuitive grounds.

It makes quite a difference as to *which* German philosopher one follows. Despite the obvious differences, there is often a marked agreement between Nietzsche and Kant. Both thinkers agree that to look into our hearts is impossible, and both present self-knowledge as a task at the same time obligatory and beyond our ability to complete. Both heap contempt upon romantic ideas of easy nobility, of 'beautiful souls' who think that they can do without anything as harsh as duty or struggle. Kant's later thought, with its more profound psychological insight, sees self-deception as the 'foul spot' upon 'human nature' (Kant 1963: 205). Nietzsche, who elevates intellectual honesty to the most supreme intellectual virtue, is in this respect at least, not very far from Kant. Both are contemptuous of pity: Kant of the 'melting compassion' and Nietzsche, in his most Stoic vein, abhors pity.

Importantly for our purpose, Nietzsche locates a certain hermeneutic *hubris* in the act of pity. Most pitiers claim to 'put themselves in the shoes of the pitied' – as we have seen, Eliot seemed to have aimed for this – and in doing so, commits the violence of the 'penetrating gaze', and fail to respect

the inaccessibility to another's experience. In doing so, the pitier robs the pitied of the last scraps of dignity still left to him. 'To offer pity is to offer contempt', writes Nietzsche in *D* 135. As Nussbaum (Schacht 1994: 153) points out, Nietzsche focuses on a specific type of pity, the Christian variety, that he associates closely with a depreciation of the world and of the body. Pity that flows from these impulses is therefore associated with a secret fear, best expressed by the famous exclamation of John Bradford on seeing some criminals led to execution: 'But for the grace of God, there goes I' (Sutherland 1978: 217). Pity is therefore not always altruistic, but most of the time egoistic. Nussbaum reminds us that our act serves to reassure us that we have 'defenses lined up against the world's assaults' (Nussbaum in Schacht 1994: 154). She also points to the link that Nietzsche makes between pity and cruelty: For once we ascribe significance to certain events in life, we make ourselves vulnerable to an endless list of possibilities for others to harm us.

The death of God did not, of course bring about the death of 'mercy, pity, peace and love'. Quite the contrary. The moral hope engendered by the Christian myth proved stronger than the myth itself. From the mid-nineteenth century, the Christian tradition itself was taken to task for 'not being Christian enough', and attacked by a plethora of proto-socialist 'improvers of mankind' – from the meliorists to the Fabian society. George Eliot is the textbook example: Remembering a conversation held with Eliot shortly before her death, F. W. H. Meyers writes:

Taking as her text the three words which have been used so often as the inspiring trumpet-call of men – the words *God, Immortality, Duty* – she pronounced with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law.¹

This kind of metaphysical thinking is of course precisely Nietzsche's problem. It is only an illusion that after the death of God his moral law remains untouched and solid, ready to serve as transcendental foundation in his place. For a long time of course, the shadow of God was to be happily embraced in the form of moral remnants:

G. Eliot. – They are rid of the Christian God and now believe all the more firmly that they must cling to Christian morality. That is an English consistency; we do not wish to hold it against little moralistic females à la

Eliot. In England one must rehabilitate oneself after every little emancipation from theology by showing in a veritably awe-inspiring manner what a moral fanatic one is. That is the penance they pay there.

We others hold otherwise. When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident: this point has to be exhibited again and again, despite the English flatheads. Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know, cannot know, what is good for him, what evil: he believes in God, who alone knows it. Christian morality is a command; its origin is transcendent; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; it has truth only if God is the truth – it stands and falls with faith in God.

When the English actually believe that they know 'intuitively' what is good and evil, when they therefore suppose that they no longer require Christianity as the guarantee of morality, we merely witness the effects of the dominion of the Christian value judgment and an expression of the strength and depth of this dominion: such that the origin of English morality has been forgotten, such that the very conditional character of its right to existence is no longer felt. For the English, morality is not yet a problem.

For Nietzsche, it was *the* problem. If there is an unconditional standard at work in Nietzsche's writings – an ethic of self-realization is clearly present right through his *oeuvre* – he certainly does not appear to think that it will be easily communicable in the simple fixity of a universal law. A wiser attempt would be to take a course of life as it is led among others as the summary of a person's attempt to realize or find that unconditional standard. Even in the unlikelihood of anyone ever finding that standard, it would be a life led closer to the reality of moral learning than Kant's catechisms. Mere conceptual interpretation will never convey the creativity open to an exemplary course of life, especially in the light of Nietzsche's account of the fragility of conscious ratiocination, with its persistent simplification of the complex reality of deeds, not to mention the ineluctable tendency to be pressed into the service of self-deception. Furthermore, the Categorical Imperative, as highest criterion of reasonableness, invites us to ensure that our course of action would be appropriate for any similar agent in similar circumstances – the old Sidgwickian line of 'a reason in one case is a reason in all cases, or it is not a reason at all'. A crucial thrust

in Nietzsche's objection to Kant lies in his characteristic assertion that we should not be asked to consider ourselves in such a position of sameness. Instead, he demands that we explicitly distinguish ourselves. He does not simply dismiss our 'shared humanity' but acts as a corrective to Kant's elimination of plurality that forms part of his oversimple universalizing procedures. Rather than to object to the entire enterprise of morality – as most people still think he does – he simply rejects the claim of any morality to universal scope and application. Such a morality is not only inhumane in the obvious economical sense – creating laws that forbid the rich and the poor alike to sleep under bridges and to steal bread – but also inhumane in that it denies difference in potential, and in particular, refuses to allow scope for the genuine individual, he who has to create his own world and cannot bear to be fettered to one set of rules. Such a monolithic ideal is responsible for the greatest injustice hitherto known to man: the reduction of a plurality of human kinds and types to the lowest common denominator. This is a crime against humanity if ever there was one. Naturally, ethical laws bind – and should bind collectively, but only across a limited number of individuals, such as a race or community. In Zarathustra's words: 'I am a law only for my kind' (Z IV, 12). The liberal dream of a universal ethical community that comprises all human beings is in reality a nightmare. The laws of such an omni-ethical community express only the commonalities and banalities of the individuals involved in the project, rather than their unique strengths and virtues and viewpoints. The function of morality is to enhance the life of a particular people, rather than the other way around.

Morality – no longer the expression of the conditions for the life and growth of a people, no longer its most basic instinct of life, but become abstract, become the antithesis of life – morality as the systematic degradation of the imagination – as the 'evil eye' for all things. (GM II)

Nietzsche's infamous crusade against Christianity should be read in this context.

Nietzsche has it against the moral monism, what I believe can rightly be called the *leftovers* of Christianity: George Eliot's morality. It is often forgotten that Nietzsche takes issue not with Christian morality in its 'pure' forms, which he readily admits has value in that it serves the 'inwardly destroyed' (BGE 62). He objects to Christian morality only where it serves to render political and moral pluralism impossible. In a strange way, he even helps to highlight the particularity – and therefore its unique *form* it

gives to life, by alerting his readers to the fact that this particular form of morality is not coextensive to morality itself: 'I negate a form of morality that has become prevalent as morality itself, the morality of decadence, or more concretely, *Christian* morality' (EH XIV, 4). He goes on to explain that his self-awarded title, the 'immoralist' designates an opposition specifically to the secularized Christian morality which had in Nietzsche's day (and still up to this day in the form of human rights) a virtual monopoly over ethical life. As an alternative, Nietzsche supports the idea of moral pluralism that reflects the rich diversity of human types on the planet. At the same time, Nietzsche the artist seeks to remind us that these different moralities vary in worth as widely as the individuals whose needs, styles and perfections they express.

Moralities must be forced to bow first of all before the *order of rank*; their presumption must be brought home to their conscience – until they finally reach agreement that it is *immoral* to say 'what is right for one is fair for the other'. (BGE 221)

Even the morality of the nobles – 'their good manners' cannot be adopted as a 'fundamental principle of society' because it defeats the purpose and it immediately becomes a principle of 'disintegration and decay' (BGE 259). It loses its aesthetic dimension and becomes yet another moralism. Instead, no single principle should ever become absolute, so for Nietzsche no single aspect of human existence should be denied or disowned.

Christianity was never in danger of being practised until the nineteenth century. Then it was taken to task for not being Christian enough. This is because its major interpreters have stripped it of its mythopoetic values and turned it into a mere moral framework. This is one of the reasons why Nietzsche never formally proclaimed himself to be an atheist: there is only one thing primmer than a reformed whore and that is an atheist trying to set the world to rights.

Morality, of course, makes the dreadful demand of finding true origins – one cannot base a moral system that forbids lying upon a lie. It was the awareness of the deceptive nature of language that led the Greeks, the last truly aesthetic race in Nietzsche's opinion, to admire Odysseus for his ability to tell lies. '[T]he most remarkable thing about it is that the antithesis of being and appearance is not felt at all, and is thus of no significance morally. Have there ever been such consummate actors!' (GS 306). For our purposes, precisely the erasure between being and appearance is of cardinal importance: for Nietzsche the work of art should not seek to reveal any higher truth behind

superficial appearance. It is not that art is mendacious because of some lack, or Platonic failure, it is just that there *is* no reality to portray.

It should be noted that even in his middle works, where he is supposed to be more sympathetic to the positivist sciences, Nietzsche remains critical of the realist movement in art, which functions as artistic analogue to the scientific positivism of its age. Although speaking specifically of Flaubert in *KSA* 11(25) note 164 from 1884, it can be taken to cover realism as genre: “The will to be objective” e.g. Flaubert is a modern misunderstanding. . . . Gentlemen [and ladies], there is no “thing in itself”! What they achieve is a kind of scientism of photography, i.e. description without perspective, a kind of Chinese painting, pure foreground and everything full to bursting’.

In the introductory section of verse that opens *GS*, Nietzsche says:

The realist painter

‘Nature is true and complete!’

when would Nature ever be represented in his picture?

Infinite is the smallest portion of the world! –

In the end he paints of it what he likes.

And what does he *like*? Whatever he can paint! (*GS*, ‘Jest, Cunning and Revenge’, 55)

The English realists, could of course not resist.

– It is characteristic of such an unphilosophical race that they should cling firmly to Christianity: they *need* its discipline if they are to become ‘moral’ and humane. The Englishman, gloomier, more sensual, stronger of will and more brutal than the German – is for just that reason, as the more vulgar *of* the two, also more pious than the German: he is in greater *need of* Christianity. To finer nostrils even this English Christianity possesses a true English by – scent *of* the spleen and alcoholic excess against which it is with good reason employed as an antidote – the subtler poison against the coarser: and indeed a subtle poisoning is in the case of coarse peoples already a certain progress, a step towards spiritualization. English coarseness and peasant seriousness still finds its most tolerable disguise in Christian gestures and in praying and psalm-singing: more correctly, it is best interpreted and given a new meaning by those things; and as for those drunken and dissolute cattle who formerly learned to grunt morally under the constraint of Methodism and more recently as the ‘Salvation Army’, a spasm of penitence may really be the highest achievement of

‘humanity’ to which they can be raised: that much may fairly be conceded. But what offends in even the most humane Englishman is, to speak metaphorically (and not only metaphorically), his lack of music: he has in the movements of his soul and body no rhythm and dance, indeed not even the desire for rhythm and dance, for ‘music’. Listen to him speak; watch the most beautiful Englishwomen walk – in no land on earth are there more beautiful doves and swans – finally: listen to them sing! But I ask too much. . . . (BGE 252)

The problem becomes obvious when one turns towards Nietzsche’s own treatment in the first *UM*, where it manifested itself in the form of David Strauss. David Strauss was a nineteenth-century ‘mythbuster’, a theologian who sought to explain the miracles of the Gospel narratives as a series of myths. However, giving up on Christianity is something entirely different from giving up on Truth, and for Nietzsche, Strauss remained in the same metaphysical matrix as before.

Eliot should have known better than to follow *German* philosophers. As Nietzsche writes, ‘German philosophy as a whole – Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, to name but the greatest – is the most fundamental form of *romanticism* and homesickness there has ever been’ (*WP* 419).

And realism is the ugly twin of Romanticism. As Oscar Wilde said in his introduction to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: ‘The nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his face in a glass.’

As the reader would have gathered by now, they stem from the same root. Much as Bacon has done centuries before, Eliot appears to have forgotten Art’s true function. That is, as Nietzsche says right at the beginning of his career in *BT* and again in *HAH* 146 ‘Art renders the sight of life bearable by laying over it the veil of impure thinking.’ Art does not simply disclose truth; instead it practices to deceive, teaching us to look upon life in every shape and form with interest and desire, to carry our feelings so far that we finally exclaim: ‘however it is, life is good’.

Christianity required its founder to die again, this time so that its morality can live. Karl Löwith, for example, sees modernity as the secularization of the Christian view on world history. For Löwith, the Christian notion of a divine intervention that would bring an end to mundane history becomes translated into the modernist ideology of progress, according to which at some time in the future humanity will have reached some kind of perfection, and history will effectively come to a halt. There is

a strong Nietzschean parallel to this: morality in the Nietzschean sense is a form of ideology, and like all forms of ideology it tends towards the absolute. In the name of absolute justice, the moral, secular *ideology* of Christianity – as opposed to the faith itself – has one particular ‘taboo’ that sustains it, namely any form of ‘discrimination’ or exclusion. Often, the faith itself that gave birth to these values is regarded as one of the main obstacles to a universally just state, because of its capacity to engender difference and dissensus.² There are other examples that embody this vice as well: all moralities of good and evil that take themselves to be the embodiment of an ultimate principle – the Law of laws, the will of God, the ethical principle at the heart of being – are ultimately doomed to commit injustice. Concomitantly, so is any idealization of justice as a state or condition ontologically prior to the human lifeworld. Every absolute or universal moral framework, precisely because it sets itself up in such a way as to exclude the negative, creates the possibility of being disrupted by it. The fixed parameters that define the limits of every universe of meaning are put in place to prevent ingress or egress, to separate outside from inside, above all, to seal the *safe* off from the dangerous. Such separation, however, sets up the very possibility it was developed to prevent, namely the invasion of human life by pain, disaster and injustice. Those who have reconciled themselves to the inevitability of tragedy are of course much wiser.

The only referential framework that could achieve the purpose for which such frameworks are designed, would be one that would include the outside within itself, an all-encompassing structure that would leave nothing outside itself. This is what Emmanuel Levinas refers to as a ‘totality’ (Levinas 1969: 72). A totality is the dream structure that would be immune to deconstruction, the centre that would not only hold, but be immovable, the irrefragable *archē* against which anarchy does not stand a chance. This is the ascetic ideal at its most destructive.

Christianity in the end became self-defeating: it was the awe-inspiring catastrophe of 2,000 years of training in truth-telling that finally forbids itself the lie involved in the belief in God. The result is that

Christianity as a dogma was destroyed by its own morality; in the same way Christianity as a morality must now perish too: we stand on the threshold of this event. After Christianity truthfulness has drawn one inference after another, it must end by drawing its most striking inference against itself; this would happen, however, when it poses the question ‘what is the meaning of the will to truth?’ (GM III, 27)

Notes

- ^{1.} Brooks, F. L. (1956) *Essays on the thought of George Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 31.
- ^{2.} See, for example, A. C. Grayling's *Against All Gods*. London: Oberon, 2007. It is highly ironic that much of the criticism against religion from the contemporary atheist movement sees Christianity as too 'Nietzschean', that is, a source of passion and conflict.

Chapter 8

Wrong but Romantic

Nietzsche had the soul of a classicist under the armour of a Romantic. His style, with its hyperbole, rich metaphor and dramatic exclamations, easily evoke the same *pathos* as Romantic poetry. There are times when even Nietzsche yearns. Compare the obviously heartfelt apostrophe of, for example, *BGE* 35: 'Oh Voltaire! Oh Humanity!' and that of a Romantic poet like Wordsworth's 'Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour'. Nietzsche's exclamations were of course of a much more ironic nature, but it cannot be denied that Nietzsche betrays more than a touch of the Romantic paintbrush. Popular romantic themes like the outsider, the misunderstood genius, and an engagement with Nature and her mysteries, abound in Nietzsche, and much has been said about the influence of German Romanticism on his work.

Nor does he show any reluctance in making the odd aside about the likes of Manfred and his equally fabulous creator, Lord Byron. Manfred inspired Nietzsche enough to write music for it, and given the importance of the role music played in his life, this is no small compliment. Like Byron, Nietzsche believed that the best place to hide was in a myth.

Bertrand Russell placed Byron among the major forces for change in the nineteenth century, arguing that '[L]ike many other prominent men he was more important as a myth than as he really was', and that his resonance was greatest outside England: 'Abroad, his way of feeling and his outlook on life were transmitted and developed and transmuted until they became so wide-spread as to be factors in great events'. His influence also reached Nietzsche, but in him it became radically transformed.

Nietzsche wrote the strangest autobiography in the history of philosophy in order to aid the development of a variety of interpretations; Byron of course, did not live long enough to have the opportunity to do so. However, both men count among the most misunderstood in their time, and justice was only done to Nietzsche years after the Nazis turned him into a philosophical untouchable. This is why the undiscerning reader easily links him with the

likes of Byron and Shelley, or else Carlyle's heroism. It is easy to be drawn into his passion and his poetry, and to forget that behind the robust rhetoric is a measured thinker: Nietzsche *is* at once his styles *and* exceeds them.

One of the earliest popular misunderstandings of Nietzsche is precisely that he is basically a Romantic. To return to Bertrand Russell once more: 'In spite of Nietzsche's criticism of the Romantics, his outlook owes much to them; it is that of aristocratic anarchism, like Byron and one is not surprised to find him admiring Byron' (Russell 1967: 729). Surprisingly enough, one finds him admiring Byron for his sense of *measure*. Rare praise indeed from Nietzsche, and rarer still for a Romantic. 'The same method [for self-mastery] is also being employed when a man's pride, for example, in the case of Lord Byron or Napoleon, rises up and feels the domination of his whole bearing and the ordering of his reason by a single effect as an affront, from where there then arises the habit and desire to tyrannize over the drive and make it, as it were, gnash its teeth. 'I refuse to be a slave of any appetite', wrote Byron in his diary (*D* 109). This is a very Nietzschean sentiment, and it is obvious that Nietzsche cannot be separated from Romanticism as he can be from, say Nazism. There is however no need to do this. It is simply more correct to say that there is Romanticism *in* his work, rather than to call him a Romantic *tout court*. Nietzsche is always more than any label. In Nietzsche's work, abundant imagery is a deliberate deconstructive strategy. The richness of his imagery and the many contradictions engendered thereby, prevents him from being included in a system, and subverts logic as the foundation for philosophy itself. For Nietzsche, logic is just another structure that developed in intellectual history, whose genealogy can be given. This genealogy makes it clear that logic itself arose from a rhetorical peremptory sentence, and is ultimately aimed at establishing and maintaining relations of power. Nietzsche too, wants to create relations of power, but only better ones. Poetic imagery serves the purpose of self-legislation and undermining existing legislation. 'We wish to encompass the world with such imagery that you shudder' (*P*72).

Like Nietzsche, the Romantic Movement is famous for questioning knowledge. Whereas David Hume dismissed the possibility for attaining knowledge on epistemological grounds, the Romantics queried its *value*. Nietzsche questions the pursuit of knowledge on both grounds: its tenability, and whether attaining it is truly liberating. Nietzsche begins *BGE* with the still startling question as to why we find truth valuable at all:

The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with

respect – what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now – and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun. Is it any wonder that we should finally become suspicious, lose patience, and turn away impatiently? that we should finally learn from this Sphinx to ask questions, too? Who is it really that puts questions to us here? What in us really wants ‘truth’? (BGE 1)

Like most decadent forms of the will to power, the will to truth has its origins in the *will to happiness*. It is not, however, an Englishman that is at fault here, but none other than Plato. The search for happiness is far older than utilitarianism. ‘Philosophy severed itself from science when it posed the question, “what is the knowledge of the world through which mankind can be made happiest?” this happened when the Socratic school arose’ (HAH 451). Since most of our unhappiness come through some form of *change* (growing old, illness and death), philosophers have deceived themselves into thinking that there is a ‘true’ realm free from the rages of time. In GS, Nietzsche writes, people have acquired their ideas through an error of their senses that suggested that ‘there are enduring things, that there are things, substances and bodies, that a thing is what it appears, that our will is free, what is good for me is good absolutely’ (GS 110). These errors, as we have seen in Chapter 3, persisted because they were *useful*. Nietzsche continues that it was the suppression of knowledge of the contingent world by Plato, and earlier still, by the Eleatics, that turned knowledge into a potent life-force. ‘They [the Eleatics] were of the belief that that their knowledge was at the same time a principle of life’ (GS 110). Knowledge can be an expression of strength, but it does not necessarily make life easier for the knowing individual.

He quotes a famous verse by Byron in support of an argument in HAH 109:

Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
must mourn the deepest o’er the fatal truth,
the tree of knowledge is not that of life.

But to *avoid* truth deliberately, is not particularly life enhancing, either. Nietzsche’s aesthetics have proved to be notoriously difficult to analyse, but one important factor stands out: art does not shield us from ugliness. It is not an escape clause in the social contract, but helps to transform the whole of the world into something strong, rich and meaningful. Genuine

art has a potency that stretches beyond the 'pretty', an exercise of a healthy will to power. Knowledge presupposes life, and besides, there is a paradox involved in such an attempt, because it implies a prior access to a standard that distinguishes clearly between truth and falsehood. We have seen in our discussion on Hume that it is very hard to avoid truth: truth *manifests* itself; it does not passively correspond to a static standard. We are always involved in truth production, and beauty plays no small role in it. For this reason, we do not have an either/or choice between truth and beauty. Nor are the two identical: although they overlap, they also exceed one another.

For the Romantics, however, the question – and the answer – was quite simple: 'Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings' wrote Keats in *Lamia*, and the Romantics prefer the angel.

At first sight, this appears to be perfectly compatible with Nietzsche's notion of the veil of art that separates man from the ugliness of true reality. The Romantics, however, tend to *identify* Truth with Beauty, much as Keats famously does in *Ode to a Grecian Urn*:

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

For all its elegance, this is still a metaphysical sentiment. It implies that there is a distinct, privileged part of the world that is more *real*, with a higher ontological status than the rest. In this, the Romantics are not that different from the Utilitarians. Like spoilt children seeking out their favourites from a bowl of assorted sweets and ignoring the rest, both the Utilitarians and the Romantics deem only the part of reality of which they approve, to be 'real'. For the Romantics, Beauty became more than a matter of style and aesthetics, it became a veritable epistemological statement, which defeated the purpose completely. As Oscar Wilde would later say, 'Yet each man kills the thing he loves' (*The Ballad of Reading Gaol* I, vii).

Heidegger of all people, tends to read Nietzsche as a quasi-romantic, who saw art as mainly world-disclosive, because it is not limited to the demands of correspondence. However, Nietzsche is not pitting art against science in the name of some mysterious transcendent 'Truth'. Art does not disclose any prior state of affairs be it the merely empirical, or the mysterious noumenon. Instead, he is arguing for the value of human creativity: it is better to live in a created world than a true one. 'The artist has, with regard to the cognition of truths, a weaker ethic than the thinker . . . he considers the continuation of his style of creation more important than scientific devotion to the truth in any form' (*HAH* 146). This is why the artist and the

child are often very similar: 'Byron, Poe, Leopardi, Kleist, Gogol are and perhaps must be men of fleeting moments, enthusiastic, sensual, childish, frivolous' (*BGE* 269). These are of course their chief charms. It is when the artist refuses his status that he becomes a problem. It is precisely because art *does not* provide us with truth that it is so valuable. Far from disclosing any form of truth, art functions best when it deceives. It then teaches us to look upon life in every shape and form with interest and desire, to carry our feelings so far that we finally exclaim 'however, life is good' (*HAH* 222). It appears that man has to be coaxed into living. The modern world, and art in particular, is driven to decadence through the simultaneous demands of a scientific insistence on certainty, and a craving for more intense emotional experience. Nietzsche notes:

Dissoluteness and indifference, burning desire, cooling of the heart – this repulsive juxtaposition is to be found in the higher societies of Europe of the present day. The artist believes he has done a great deal when, through his art, he has for once set the heart aflame besides these burning desires: and likewise the philosopher if, given the coolness of his heart he has in common with his age, he succeeds through his world-denying judgement in cooling the heat of desire in himself and in this society. (*HAH* 182)

A particular metaphysical element that became much stronger in the Romantic period is the self-identical foundational subject. For Nietzsche, it seems that while the logic of metaphysics, and as such the entire edifice of Western culture, is in the process of disintegration, the transcendent formulation of their authority still remains the standard against which value is measured. The idea of the artist as legislator, and therefore the absolute author, is strongly present in the Romantics. The Romantics initiated a metaphysical construct that contemporary thought is still trying to undo. Most Romantics saw art not just as a manifestation but as the very source of truth, a privileged portal to ultimate truth that surpassed the analytical methods of the Enlightenment. Wordsworth can be seen as one of the best English examples of this tendency ('We murder to dissect') and Shelley explicitly states that poets are 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' in his famous 'Defence of Poetry'. The Romantics, for all their obsession with the cult of the individual genius, also paved the way for what was to become in our time the celebrated 'death of the author'. The romantic idea of genius stresses the unconscious, unlearnable dimension of creative action, and as such elevates the work of art above the artist.

As the objective embodiment of precious but elusive insight, art became for the Romantics the only way to a dimension from which mere rational thought was forever barred, and poetry the foremost expression of this ability, something that could push well beyond the limiting confines of standard Enlightenment thinking.

It was of course perfectly understandable that to Nietzsche Romanticism would have a particular allure in England. Whoever dares to distinguish himself in thoroughly bourgeois England had no alternative but to succumb to Romanticism, despite its obvious drawbacks. 'An Englishman recently described the most general danger facing uncommon men in a society tied to convention. '[S]uch alien characters at first become submissive, then melancholic, then ill and finally, they die. A Shelley would not have been able to live in England, and a race of Shelleys would have been impossible' (*UM* III, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', 3). Nietzsche refers here to Walter Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*. It is probably quoted from memory, and incidentally, Bagehot refers to New England, not England.¹

Although Nietzsche certainly criticizes the metaphysical suppression of the body, he simultaneously believes that the attempt to give affectivity its proper place has only resulted in the artificial Romanticism of modernity. With the Romantics, man became a slave to his subconscious, just as he became a slave to reason with the birth of rational thought.

Nihilism thus has its aesthetic dimension. To be sure, intoxication is a prerequisite for art. '[F]or art to exist, a certain physiological precondition is indispensable: intoxication. Intoxication must first have heightened the excitability of the entire machine' (*TI*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', 8). However, man does not live by intoxication alone, and one of the main problems that accompanies modern art is its neurosis.

What was *sick* in Rousseau was admired and imitated most. Lord Byron related to him; also worked himself up into sublime poses and vindictive rancor; sign of 'meanness'; later attained balance through Venice and comprehended what produces more ease and well-being – *l'insouciance*. (WP 100)

Another objection to Romanticism is its exaggerated desire for immediacy. The defining theme of the Romantic period is the idea that art promises immediate knowledge, a knowledge pure and unpolluted by any form of mediation or conceptual thought. Although Nietzsche is capable of sympathizing with the all-too-human desire for immediate knowledge, Nietzsche rejects the idea that art *can* penetrate to the ultimate truth of the world,

bringing subject and object or subject and subject together in a supreme moment of aesthetic insight. Art is not an instrument for extracting 'truth', but a vehicle of illusion.

There is something undeniably melodramatic about the Romantic obsession with feeling. Precisely that which the Romantics valued most, namely style, became sacrificed in the rush to avoid reason. Unbridled emphasis on emotion tends to produce perversion and sickness, not strength. Shelley, for example, was far too melancholic to be truly strong: 'But where does the moral pessimism of Pascal belong? The metaphysical pessimism of the Vedanta philosophy? (or of Shelley)?' (WP 1020).

What is romanticism? Every art, every philosophy may be viewed as a remedy and an aid in the service of growing and struggling life: they always presuppose suffering and sufferers. But there are two kinds of sufferers, on the one hand, those who suffer from an *overflowness* of life, and those who suffer from an *impoverishment* of life, and seek rest, stillness, calm seas, redemption from themselves in art and knowledge, or intoxication, convulsions, anaesthetics and madness. All romanticism in art and knowledge corresponds to the dual needs of the latter type, and that includes Schopenhauer as well as Wagner. (GS 370)

Romanticism is short and sweet; it burns out too quickly to keep one warm against the cold of nihilism. It also tends to be marked by a kind of intense self-absorption. As Nietzsche makes clear in *GM*, there is something downright dangerous about turning cultural energies, or in Nietzsche's terms, the Will to Power, against oneself. It generates a fetish which eventually, becomes subjectivity. Subjectivity, as the Freud-inspired Nietzsche reader knows, is in fact an anomaly, a by-product of an intensely painful process of taming.

Nietzsche describes Romanticism indeed in medical terms, as a disease in need of a cure. In painting, Delacroix of course personified the 'modern passions, the nerves, the confusion, the *falseness* of our times' (KSA 11.25 [141]). Characteristic of romantic decadence is the inability to understand *pace*. In a nutshell:

I call particular attention to Delacroix, Wagner's closest relation – one and all great discoverers in the realm of the sublime, also of the ugly and horrible, even greater discoverers in effects, in display, in the art of the shop window, one and all talents far beyond their genius – virtuosos through and through, with uncanny access to everything that seduces,

lures, constrains, overwhelms, born enemies of logic and straight lines, constantly hankering after the strange, the exotic, the monstrous, the crooked, the self-contradictory; as human beings Tantaluses of the will, plebeians risen in the world who knew themselves incapable, in their lives and in their works, of a noble tempo, *a lento* – think of Balzac, for instance – unbridled workers, almost destroying themselves through work; antinomians, fomenters of moral disorder, ambitious, insatiable men without balance or enjoyment; one and all collapsing and sinking at last before the Christian Cross (and with every right: for who among them would have been profound or primary enough for a philosophy of *anti-Christ*) – on the whole an audacious-daring, splendidly violent, high-flying type of higher men who bore others up with them and whose lot it was to teach their century – and it is the century of the *mob*! –

In contrast to classicism, whose affectivity is under control, Romanticism is the ideology of excess. It is driven by a decadent desire for desire itself, and as such falls into an uncontrolled, hyper-affective state. The result is bourgeois taste: ‘the florid style in art is the consequence of a poverty of organizing power in the face of a superabundance of means and ends’ (HAH 115). What this amounts to is the artist being overwhelmed by his own material. So is the viewer by ‘a wild multiplicity, an overwhelming mass before which the senses become confused, brutality in colour, material, desires’ (WP 827). Or else, the artist turns into some kind of ‘girl’. The Romantic composer Robert Schuman is contemptuously dismissed as a ‘tender-heart who wallowed in all sorts of anonymous bliss and woe, a kind of girl’ (BGE 245).

Nietzsche regards Romanticism as a form of ‘false intensification’. ‘In romanticism’, he says, ‘this constant *Espressivo* is no sign of strength, but a feeling of deficiency’ (WP 826). Against the contemporary emphasis on expression and the resulting ‘cult of orgies of feeling’ he argues that ‘one has to tyrannize in order to reproduce any effect’ (WP 826). This is no apology for political brutality, but rather a defence, more necessary now than ever, of style. This theme first appears in a more unrefined form in *BT*, which contains Nietzsche’s still immature expression of a philosophy of art, which would appear in many guises, as befitting a philosopher who attempted to rehabilitate the ephemeral. His position on art is guided by his constant concern with introducing a healthy scepticism and maintaining a belief in normativity or, in Nietzsche’s own words, ‘the doctrine of lawfulness in becoming and of play in necessity’ (KSA 1.883). The work of art saves us from an excess of truth, from the overabundant generosity of nature. As we have seen, man does not suffer a genuine lack of meaning

in his relationship with the world; it is rather a lack induced by a surfeit of meaning. The work of art obscures this surplus, and only allows it in portions manageable by the human mind. Style is the result of those who can restrict themselves to that which is strictly necessary. *Laissez-faire* is a failure both as economic and aesthetic principle, for it is in fact nothing other than a submission to nature and her excess. For the Greeks, this principle would entail a return to barbarism, for it is only by stepping out of nature's give and take, the cycles of life, and establishing a more permanent domain that man reaches a fully human status.

Sounding almost like a Romantic himself, he also writes:

As I proceeded alone, I trembled; soon after I was sick, more than sick, namely weary from the inevitable disappointment about everything that remained to inspire us modern men, about the universally *wasted* energy, work, hope, youth, love; weary with disgust at the femininity and ill-bred rapturousness of this romanticism, at the whole idealistic deception and pampering of the conscience that had here triumphed once again over one of the bravest; weary, finally and not least of all, from the grief aroused by an inexorable suspicion – that, after this disappointment, I was condemned to mistrust more profoundly, to despise more profoundly, to be more profoundly alone than ever before. (*HAH*, First Sequel)

For Nietzsche, Romanticism is driven by need, by lack and by hunger. He gives a neat definition in *WP*844: 'A Romantic is an artist whose great dissatisfaction with himself makes him creative'. Classicism, by contrast, is driven by life, force and vitality. In *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, Nietzsche formally describes the opposition between the two: 'Classicism and romantic – both those spirits of a classical and romantic bent – these two species exist at all times – entertain a vision of the future, but the former do so out of a *strength* of their age – the latter out of its weakness.' In *WP*847 he even goes as far as to ask whether the antithesis of the active and the reactive cannot be redefined in terms of classical and romantic. Strictly speaking, the Romantics are not the only aesthetic decadents though, he is equally harsh on the baroque as representing everything good in exaggerated form. '[The florid style is the result of a poverty of organizing power in the face of a superabundance of means and ends' (*HAH* II, 117). According to Nietzsche, the baroque is almost like a kind of swan song of truly great art.

The baroque style originates whenever any great style starts to fade, whenever the demands in the art of classic expression grow too great. . . . It is

precisely now, when music is entering its last epoch, that we can get to know the phenomenon of the baroque in an especially splendid form. (HAH II, 144)

As remedy against the excesses of the baroque, Nietzsche recommends using ‘biting coldness’, judiciously applying the limit:

All modern writing is characterized by exaggeratedness, and even when it is written simply, the words it contains are *felt* too eccentrically. Rigorous reflection, terseness, coldness, simplicity, deliberately pursued even to their limit, self-containment of the feelings and silence in general – that alone can help us. (HAH 195)

In Nietzsche’s eyes, the Romantic obsession with sickness and death was in itself sickly and deadly. In *D* 109, they are even called ‘resurrectors of the dead’. Romanticism was a disease that only discipline could cure. This is the ‘hard’, ‘masculine’ Nietzsche, the Nietzsche everybody since the Second World War did their best to avoid or deny. But this is an extremely important Nietzsche, without whom neither *Übermenschlichkeit* nor any post-decadent concept can be conceived.

I began by *forbidding* myself, thoroughly and in principle, all romantic *music*, this ambiguous, inflated, stifling art that deprives the spirit of its severity and cheerfulness and fosters every kind of vague longing and spongy, exploitative desire. Even today ‘*cave musicam*’ [‘beware music’] is still my advice to all who are man enough to insist on cleanliness in things of the spirit; such music unnerves, softens, feminizes, its ‘eternal womanly’ draws *us* – downwards! . . . At that time I was first and foremost suspicious and circumspect *towards* romantic music; and if I hoped for something at all from music anymore, it was the prospect that a musician might come – bold, subtle, malicious, southerly, superhealthy enough to confront that music and in an immortal fashion *take revenge* on it. – (HAH 3)

Curiously, none an authority less than Byron himself would agree.

Lord Byron, a great man whose instinct we can trust and whose theory lacked nothing but thirty years more of practice, once stated: ‘As to poetry, in general, the more I think about it, the more I am firm in the conviction that we are all on the wrong path, each and every one. We are all following a revolutionary system that is inherently false. Our generation or the next will come to the same conclusion.’ (HAH 221)

The original passage comes from a letter written on 15 September 1817:

With regard to poetry in general, I am convinced, the more I think of it, that he (Moore) and all of us – Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I – are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free; and that the present and next generations will finally be of this opinion. (Byron 1922: 86)

Nietzsche is thus far more of a disciplined thinker than is commonly thought to be the case. One is so used to the most extreme, and famous of his exclamations, that one far too easily forgets that he despised melodrama, and is above all, the defender of good judgement. The second book of *HAH* features this theme many times, but this is one of Nietzsche's lesser read texts. As a result, this theme is often missed. He writes, 'All great art likes to arrest the feelings on their course and not allow them to run quite to their conclusion' (*HAH* II, 136). Great artistic representation is an elitist activity, which consists of taking just the right element at the right time. Great art is a selective image of the world, and great artists check their creative impulses before they run riot.

The good poet of the future will depict only reality, and completely ignore all those fantastic, superstitious half-mendacious, faded subjects upon which earlier poets demonstrated their powers. Only reality, but by no means every reality – he will depict a selective reality. (*HAH* II, 114)

The noble Greeks conceived of the artist as a kind of lawgiver, or builder of walls that separate. Through the action of *poësis*, the ancients were able to give form to their world, and create a stabilized unity that was, if not exactly immortal, at least less mortal than man himself. Likewise, the aesthetic relationship to the self that Michel Foucault identifies as an alternative to the forms of modern self-subjugation took in the classical world the form of pleasures to be *mastered*. Nature is excess, mankind form-giver and judge. These techniques of the self, as Foucault demonstrates throughout his work, were associated with dietetics, looking after the body, economics, managing a household and erotics, shaping the self through the senses, and were treated almost as a *game* to be mastered and in which to excel. Moderation, understood as the control of pleasures, entails freedom from oneself, and thereby domination over oneself as over others. To drive the

point home, let us look at WP993:

It is a comfort of me to know that above the steam and filth of human lowlands there is a *higher, brighter* humanity, very small in number (for everything outstanding is by its very nature rare): one belongs to it, not because one is more talented or more virtuous or more heroic or more loving than the men below, but – because one is colder, brighter, more far-seeing, more solitary, because one endures, prefers, demands solitude as happiness, as privilege, as condition of existence, because one lives among clouds and lightning as among one's own kind, but equally among rays of sunlight, drops of dew, flakes of snow, and everything that necessarily comes from the heights, and when it moves, moves eternally only in the direction from above to below. Heroes, martyrs, geniuses and enthusiasts are not still, patient, subtle, cold enough for us. (WP 998)

Note

- ¹ This is a moot point; one wonders whether Emerson would have agreed.

Chapter 9

Shakespeare, Sterne and Stage

There is nothing more paradoxical than the fact that the English, the people who dedicated their entire philosophical edifice to the eradication of tragedy should have produced the greatest tragic genius the world has ever known. And there is no genius greater than a tragic genius. The current attempts to deny or relativize that genius is far more in keeping with the usual English habit.

It is only a contemporary interpreter that could possibly read Nietzsche as viewing Shakespeare as embodying slave morality. This is perhaps not as surprising as it may appear, after all, since Terry Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, *everything* is bourgeois. Scott Wilson, for example, writes in *Philosophical Shakespeares* that 'but beyond philosophical niceties, Nietzsche's view is also an acknowledgement that Shakespeare's *oeuvre* is not the writing of a "master", but a "slave", a bourgeois – or at best a "licensed fool" (even as the mask of Lord Bacon)' (Wilson 2000: 87). No interpretation could be more slavish or further from doing justice to Nietzsche and his view of Shakespeare, than this slavish interpretation. Wilson appears to adhere to that dangerous habit of taking Nietzsche far too literally when it comes to mastership. This is a bad habit which, unfortunately, did not die out in a Berlin bunker in 1945. Wilson, for example, associates Nietzsche's master with the historical upper classes.

The code of honour of the aristocratic, warrior classes was being subjected to a dual process of 'gentrification' and incredulity. In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, for example, 'honour' comes under profound critical scrutiny. Occasionally, it is invoked nostalgically, but more often than not it is represented satirically (Hotspur), cynically (Prince Hal), or is subject to open ridicule (Falstaff) to cite just one play. The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are part of popular theatre that catered for the urban 'middling sort' of apprentices, tradesmen and artisans as well as for the lower gentry, bureaucrats and politicians who would be so influential

in the coming parliamentary struggle against the absolutist designs of the Stuart monarchy. Such a theatre, for Nietzsche, is clear evidence that ‘the plebeianism of the modern spirit is of English origin’. While Nietzsche acknowledges that it is possible to appreciate the ‘artistic refinement’ of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, this can only occur despite the ‘repellent fumes and proximity of the English rabble in which Shakespeare’s taste and art lives’. There is of course a heavily metaphorical air about these repellent fumes. They are also redolent of ‘Puritan slave morality’ and the kind of radical Protestantism, that will provide, according to Nietzsche’s contemporary Max Weber, ‘the spirit of capitalism’. (Wilson 2000: 86)

While Wilson knows his Shakespeare – the social interpretation of *Henry IV* Part I is perfectly sound – it is not how Nietzsche saw and used Shakespeare. For one, ‘the artist who never left the stage’ contributed to teaching Nietzsche to rehabilitate the aesthetic in the face of the realist obsession with truth.

This chapter argues against Wilson, that the ‘Spanish barbarian’ Shakespeare operates in Nietzsche’s text as a clear example of masterly genius, and what is more, figures as an important Dionysian corrective to the anaemic Apollonianism that is for Nietzsche modern rationalist culture. Furthermore, perplexing Nietzschean concepts like the Eternal Recurrence and *amor fati* make much more sense when brought into contact with Nietzsche’s Shakespeare.

We know that Shakespeare was a peripheral influence on Nietzsche, he never formally studied him. His first contact with Shakespeare can be traced to the Christmas of 1861, when he received the standard German edition (the Schlegel-Tieck edition), as a gift. By the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare performances became staple fare throughout European theatres, and we know that Nietzsche took every opportunity to attend. In November 1883, he urged his sister Elizabeth to read Shakespeare, because his characters exhibit the kind of strength of which ‘our age’ is so poor: ‘raw, hard, powerful, granite people’ and capable of ‘taking pleasure in cruelty’. He certainly did not shrink from openly defending rank and qualitative distinction, and in *EH* 14, ‘The Case of Wagner’, 4, Nietzsche states that the first point on which he ‘tries the reins’, that is, tests an individual, is ‘to see whether a man has a feeling for distance in his system, whether he sees rank, order, degree everywhere’. This recalls the famous speech by Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, about the necessary order of things:

The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre
Observe degree, priority and place,

Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office and custom, all in the line of order;

For Nietzsche, tragedy is much more than a literary genre; a tragic attitude to life is for Nietzsche the strong, healthy alternative to the sickly utopianism of his own time. In all the ways that matter, tragedy is the optimistic antithesis to utopianism. All the thinkers we have dealt with up to now lived for the future, for a time when the human condition could be conceivably *different*. Tragedy is a way of reconciling man to the dread-inspiring idea that the human condition is never going to change radically, and yet continue to revel in the joys that life has to offer.

It seems that tragedy is on shaky ground every time man appears not to be. Enlightenment thinking, that epitome of human self-assertion, is essentially optimistic, especially in its modern variation. Reason, objectivity and disinterestedness are on the side of the unfortunate, or can at least be employed to ameliorate their fate. Claude Levi-Strauss describes views like these as typical of the so-called separatist cosmology that flowed from Descartes. This view is characterized by a separation of entities and their subsequent unification in abstract constructions, as is the case with the Hegelian dialectic, for example. In an interconnected cosmology, on the other hand, such as that of the ancient Hellenic world, entities and categories are also distinguished but the distinctions are not so absolute; they hide various implicit connections. Mircea Eliade makes a similar distinction in *Cosmos and History*. There is, he says, significant difference between 'archaic' or 'anhistorical' societies and modern 'historical' societies. Archaic societies are not necessarily more 'primitive' than those with a modern historical sensibility, if anything, their periodic return to 'the mythical time at the beginning of things' (Eliade 1969: 4) invigorates them, and serves as a useful episode of forgetfulness, that allows them to continue anew. It is the 'historical' societies, with their well-written histories that are incapacitated by remembering too well. Sounding almost like Nietzsche, Eliades writes that

any form whatever, by the mere fact that it exists as such and endures, necessarily loses vigour and becomes worn; to recover vigour, it must be reabsorbed into the formless if only for an instant; it must be restored to the primordial unity from which it issued; in other words, it must return to the 'chaos' (on the cosmic plane) to 'orgy' (on the social plane) to 'darkness' (for seed). (Eliades 1969: 4)

These dual categorizations are of course not a precise distinction; all cultures apply principles of differentiation, categorization and ordering.

Without such differentiation, man would be lost in a chaos of shifting impressions. As S. K. Lange renders it,

man can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with, but he cannot deal with Chaos. Because his characteristic function and highest asset is conception, his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe – the uncanny, as it is popularly called. (1967: 76)

For the nineteenth-century German, Shakespeare provided an exotic, inspiring alternative to his own utopian age with its modest aims. As much as Nietzsche disliked the amorphousness that accompanies cosmopolitanism, he appreciated the opportunity to measure his own age against that of more healthy, robust and ‘barbaric’ ages. ‘True, through this unshackling we enjoy for a time the poetry of all peoples, everything that has grown up in hidden places, elemental, blooming wildly, strangely beautiful and gigantically irregular, from the folk song right up to the “great barbarian”¹ – Shakespeare. We taste the joys of local colour and period costume, which were alien to all artistic peoples heretofore; we reap in rich measure the “barbaric advantages” of our time, on which Goethe insisted against Schiller, in order to put the formlessness of his Faust in the most favourable light’ (HAH 221).

Nietzsche’s notion of the tragic consists of two distinct elements, namely the resurrection of a greater, impersonal cosmological order, and a chance for man to interact heroically with it. Pain, suffering and contradiction are no longer objections to existence, but an expression of the rich tensions within existence itself.

The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering – do you not know that only *this* discipline has created all enhancements so far? That tension in the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength . . . whatever has been granted to the human soul of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness – was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? (BGE 225)

Nor do these terms denote isolation from reality, but form our most intimate points of union with it. This requires a radical reconception of our relationship with time, as well as a new appreciation of the *innocence* of becoming. As George J. Stack points out, Nietzsche’s phrase ‘beyond good and evil’ seems to carry more than mere ethical connotations, but implies ‘an attitude towards the entire panorama of actual and the cosmos. He counsels us to “think cosmically”’ (Stack 1992: 223).

Tragedy indeed implies a reconciliation to a greater cosmological order. One of the reasons why it is so difficult to ‘think beyond good and evil’, is simply the problem of human situatedness: we are incapable of evaluating in terms that stretch beyond the limits of a single life span. As a result, we are intensely aware of our own vulnerability, and we develop moral frameworks that serve as a bulwark of protection against a cruel, unkind world. As we have seen, however, moral justifications of the world are always bound to fail, because it demands from a greater, cosmological order to make sense in human terms. This is nothing short of hubris.

There is only one option open to man, and that is to meet the world on its own terms. We have said earlier that the ultimate artist is the Will to Power itself. If the Will to Power is a creator, one can only make sense of – never redeem! – the world by joining its forces as they play themselves out. This is why a leading Nietzsche expert – perhaps in an effort not to replicate Heidegger’s stern metaphysical judgement upon Nietzsche as ‘metaphysical’ – prefers to describe Nietzsche’s engagement with Being as a ‘dramatology’ rather than an ontology (Goosen 2001: 53). The reason for this is precisely that Nietzsche never developed a systematic metaphysics, and expressed his disdain for systematizers on several occasions. Furthermore, he never commits the folly of looking for a *fundamentum inconcussum*, a bad habit of which modern philosophy somehow never seems to tire. Instead, as Goosen points out, with his strong emphasis on the rhetorical, Nietzsche enquires after the way in which beings make their appearance on the worldly stage. ‘Reality shows us an enchanting wealth of types, the abundance of a lavish play and change of forms’ (*TI*, ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’, 6). This is why Nietzsche prefers a vocabulary of the stage as opposed to an abstract metaphysical ontology. Consider, for example, the following famous rhetorical question: ‘Around the hero everything becomes a tragedy, around the demi-god a satyr-play; and around God everything becomes what? Perhaps a “world”? –’

Nietzsche’s project can be succinctly summarized as an attempt to *link man again to eternity*, or to perform the greatest feat of resurrection possible in the Nietzschean framework: to resurrect a sense of the tragic to aid the creation of a new world. As we have seen, Nietzsche asserts that the attempt to exorcize the tragic from the human consciousness, that is, all mystery, all sense of suffering and pain, conflict, irrationality and contradiction, is ultimately to destroy the ground for being linked to eternity. This brings us to one of Nietzsche’s most substantial charges against metaphysics, namely that the philosophical faith in logical categories leads to a petrification and impoverishment of life. And an impoverished life is an unjust life.

Justice is served where something reaches its fullest potential. Where life manifests itself at its meanest and in its weakest form, there lies Nietzsche's conception of injustice. Where multidimensionality, plurality and complexity are reduced and denied, the possibility of a rich, overflowing and just life disappears.

The Eternal Recurrence is one of Nietzsche's tactics in attempting to think the human beyond the modernist notion of complete self-mastery that paved the way to modern nihilism. Against the pride of the modern 'self-made' man, Nietzsche posits a notion of fate that serves to remind us that we are not capable of fabricating ourselves, at least not completely. As we have seen in our introduction Nietzsche considered different 'types' of man, an 'every type has his limits' (Aphorism 12286, *NL* 87–88, *KSA* 13.316). The greatest limit is a self-imposed one. Those that Nietzsche terms slavish or weak *demand* to become transparent to themselves and bring themselves in perfect accord with the workings of the world. By doing this, they abdicate the uniquely human privilege of legislating to oneself. Were humans truly transparent to themselves, no drama would ever occur, since drama involves the unfolding of the unexpected. Genuine freedom is to be found in the space between the framework determined by fate and circumstance, and the complex, open-ended set of characteristics that make up the self. By denying their own complexity, the slaves attempt to renounce the indeterminacy of the human that is the root of his freedom and the space for playing out the ultimate agonal game: that of human (self)-legislation versus the free play of the cosmic forces.

This is, however, also one of the reasons why the Eternal Recurrence is such a burden: man will never be able to break through the anonymous workings of the will to power and bring the giant clockwork of the world to a standstill. Nietzsche tries to move beyond the metaphysical cliché of free will and determinism. These terms are generally conceived as something *outside* the subject as part of the subject-object dichotomy. Nietzsche attempts to rethink them in such a way as to bind them and the self together and remove their oppositional, antithetic character.

For Nietzsche, the world is enough because the self forms part of it. The Eternal Recurrence is a way to think of time and man's relationship with it in the wake of the failure of the Great Redemption metanarratives, an attempt to join into the play of the world rather than to try and work against it.

The meaning of the Eternal Recurrence shatters every notion of eternity as static. The wheel of Being is of course an archaic symbol in both the East and the West of an eternal round of existence without meaning, purpose

or direction, except insofar as such a way of existence brings atonement from a primal guilt. Zarathustra's 'teachers', his animals celebrate the wheel of time not as a Catherine's wheel, as wheel of torture, but as a 'wheel of opportunity': man does not need to labour so hard in order to create a discourse of redemption, because the world itself provides it. The fact that, as the anonymous French adage goes, '*tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse*'² is an opportunity, not something to lament. The idea of the Eternal Recurrence is the most supreme challenge that man can face, the ultimate test of courage, for it poses the question of whether one's life can be affirmed as it is in total, in the here and now, without any hope of redemption. That is, without the hope that the world will be improved. This is because the world as it is *requires no redemption*. Utopianism is superfluous. Because it is well suited as it is to bring out the best in the best of men, it is sufficiently rich in power to allow human strength to flourish, because even the strongest, the noblest and the most beautiful type of individual will *never bring it to an end*. It is possible to cite Voltaire's Dr Pangloss³ favourite maxim here without intending his irony: this is indeed the best of all possible worlds. Not perhaps for man universally, but it may well be the best of all possible worlds for the strong. All the hardships, all the pain and all the conflicts in it make it possible for strength to flourish *as* strength. Here is Nietzsche's categorical imperative – far more challenging than Kant's because it calls for an ethic of total affirmation.

When things get difficult, however, there is always ritual. Tragedy arose out of the tragic chorus of satyrs, votaries of Dionysus, remainders of an originary, primordial nature. This chorus of 'natural beings' embodies the 'metaphysical comfort' every tragedy leaves behind – that life is at bottom, despite appearances to the contrary, powerful and an infinite source of joy. Nietzsche characterizes the metaphysical comfort proper to tragedy as the recognition that 'beneath the whirl of appearances eternal life flows on indestructibly'. Art not only renders life 'bearable by laying over it the veil of impure thinking' (*HAHI*, 146). It is art that allows us to live in the world, not by 'making it manifest', but by 'teaching us to look upon life in every shape and form with interest and desire, to carry our feelings so far that we finally exclaim "however it is, life is good"' (*HAHI*, 222).

The tragic joy in the destruction of the individual can only be understood from the 'spirit of music' which expresses eternal life beyond all appearance and despite all destruction. The eternal life is untouched by the destruction of the hero, the highest expression of the will. Life will continue even after the death of Brutus, one of Shakespeare's most beautiful creations. Tragedy affirms belief in eternal life while music is the 'immediate' idea

of this life. Music affirms ceaseless change as the 'eternally creative'. The spirit of music that animates tragedy is 'the greed for existence and pleasure in existence that animates the primordial being itself. Under the spell of this art we are united with the immeasurable, primordial pleasure in existence' and imitate the *indestructibility* and eternity of pleasure. As such, it is an affirmation of the sublime totality of being: without purpose, *sans raison*.

Even in Nietzsche's earliest published work, *BT*, there is already a rejection of the most salient metaphysical categories, such as essence and appearance. We inhabit a semiotic universe of representations, where the 'truth' of reality can be conveyed only in the mediated form of a myth, namely King Midas's encounter with Silenius. Nietzsche respects the Dionysian dimension of the world enough not to try and explain this condition. Instead (as Sartre would also do later), he attempted to describe the feeling of nausea that besets one once one has glimpsed the abyss that is the absence of metaphysical meaning. Better still, he allowed others to do it. He writes:

[A]s soon as that quotidian reality enters consciousness once more it is viewed with loathing, and the consequence is an ascetic, abulic state of mind. In this sense Dionysian man might be said to resemble Hamlet: both have looked deeply into the true nature of things, they have *gained knowledge* and are now loath to act. They realize that no action of theirs can work any change in the eternal condition of things, and they regard the imputation as ludicrous or debasing that they should set right the time which is out of joint. Knowledge kills action, for in order to act we require the veil of illusion; such is Hamlet's doctrine, not to be confounded with the cheap wisdom of Jack the Dreamer, who through too much reflection, as it were a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action. What, both in the case of Hamlet and of Dionysian man, overbalances any motive leading to action, is not reflection but knowledge, the apprehension of truth and its terror. Now no comfort any longer avails, desire reaches beyond the transcendental world, beyond the gods themselves, and existence, together with its glittering reflection in the gods and an immortal Beyond, is denied. The truth once seen, man is aware everywhere of the ghastly absurdity of existence, comprehends the symbolism of Ophelia's fate and the wisdom of the wood sprite Silenus: nausea invades him. (*BT* 7)

Hamlet is the quintessential victim of history: time's fool, just like Romeo and Harry Hotspur. In tragedy, the Apollonian principle, represented by

the tragic hero, is overcome by the events, the principle of Dionysian chaos. In many ways, *Hamlet* is the perfect tragedy, but he is also one of Shakespeare's most mysterious figures. Samuel Beckett once said that it is impossible to create a character more modern than Hamlet. He is truly a man for all seasons, and that is exactly his problem. He simply knows too much to act. None other than Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw Hamlet as a man paralysed by thought, much as Coleridge himself was a man who could rarely carry out his grand plans, because he overthought them. Hamlet is an over-Apollonian character who gets overtaken by Dionysius. As much as he tried to distance himself from the events (e.g. the rejection of Ophelia), he gets drawn back in. At the beginning of the play, Hamlet appears as a brilliant Machiavelli, who even resorts to stage tactics in order to trap the royal couple. Eventually, however, the final killing of Claudius emerges more by accident than deliberate plan. Even when Hamlet deliberately forces the poison down his throat (V.ii.326), it is more an act of desperation than deliberation, or in Nietzschean terms, more reaction than action. It must be emphasized, however, the *character* is intended here, not the Shakespearean *oeuvre en masse*. The Apollonian veil of protection was ripped from his eyes and Hamlet became the Apollo of Elsinore. And no single human being can bear the burden of being a god alone. In *EH* II, 'Why I Am So Clever', section 4, Nietzsche asks: 'Is Hamlet understood? No doubt, *certainly* is what drives man insane.' As Nietzsche repeats in *BGE* 208, Hamlet is no sceptic, he knows too much to be allowed this luxury. And as T. S. Eliot famously said, 'Mankind cannot bear much reality'. Hamlet clearly yearned for the freedom that forgetting would bring:

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet within a month,
Let me not think on't. (I.i.118)

Risking cliché, one might say that Hamlet is modern man himself. At least Nietzsche would agree. In the second *UM* he makes it clear that an over-saturation with history is the cause of modern man's malaise. Seeing the present purely through the optics of the past fails to encourage the growth, maturity and creativity of a culture. (It also encourages death by poison.) He identifies two modes of this sickness.

First is monumental history, or the tendency to worship a hero to such an extent that no one else stands a chance of ever achieving anything in the

eyes of history. Shakespeare understood the problem. He has Cassius say the following about Caesar:

Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world
like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonourable graves. (*Julius Caesar* I.ii.134)

Shakespeare himself operates as a kind of Colossus figure that no modern writer can hope to transcend. Shakespeare is mentioned twice as impossible standard, once in *BT*:

The perfection of these dream scenes might almost tempt us to consider the dreaming Greek as a Homer and Homer as a dreaming Greek; which would be as though the modern man were to compare himself in his dreaming to Shakespeare. (*BT* 2)

In the second *UM*, Shakespeare operates as the perfect example of the problem that monumental history really presents:

It would be a horrible idea that one day it may have disappeared and now the only thing left behind is the externality, that arrogant, clumsy, and respectfully unkempt German externality. Almost as terrible as if that inner life, without people being able to see it, sat inside, counterfeited, colored, painted over, and had become an actress, if not something worse, as, for example, Grillparzer, who stood on the sidelines as a quiet observer, appears to assume about his experience as a dramatist in the theater: 'We feel with abstractions,' he says, 'we hardly know any more how feeling expresses itself among our contemporaries. We let our feelings jump about in ways they do not affect us any more. Shakespeare has destroyed everything new for us'. (*UM* II, IV)

The second form saturation with history takes, is of course antiquarian history, where something is revered simply because it is old. Bernard Shaw, with his tirades about 'Bardology' may have thought the cult of Shakespeare guilty of this. However, for Nietzsche, Shakespeare offered a window into a world where the *principium individuationis*, and the foundational metaphysics that were to follow it, have not yet become absolute. Shakespeare offers a space for ritualization. The ego, with its constitutive dream of autonomy, is still merely the unreal seam at which the Dionysian force of irrational

vitality encounters the Apollonian vision of order. In this encounter, subjectivity appears as an epiphenomenon within the interplay between great subjectless cosmic forces, in the *interspace* between the tendencies towards self-preservation and self-annihilation that exist within a vivacious yet unintentional and indifferent natural process. 'A great drama', Nietzsche writes in Aphorism 580 (*Nachlass*, Autumn 1869–Autumn 1871, KSA 7.211) 'is the world itself'. Likewise, it is possible only in the light of the primacy of the cosmos as a whole to read his descriptions of the vicissitudes of human life. Reversals of fortune are not primarily human phenomena which are deplored or cheered. Tragic insight shows, mostly without the actors being aware of the fact, that man's actions are only part of a much larger framework. Nietzsche thinks of the relationship between self and world in terms of which the human being remains inextricably bound up with the world, which both informs and is formed by our interpretations. It is possible to describe this link as the 'unlogical grounding principle of all things' (*HAH* 31, KSA 2.51). Accordingly, the interpretation of the world is neither simply determined by forces outside the self, nor a function of a self-sufficient self. Nietzsche even goes as far as to find the division between man and world *laughable*: 'we laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition "man and world"' (*GS* 346, KSA 3.581).

Tragedy is the very opposite of *poetic* justice – perhaps of justice as such. The critic John Dennis complained in 1721 of Shakespeare's plays that

The good and the bad perish promiscuously . . . there can be no or very little instruction in them: for such promiscuous events call the government of providence into question, and by skeptics and libertines are resolved into chance. (Poole 2005: 119)

Dennis defends here a clear separation of the goats and the sheep, a comfortable system in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished (and are easily distinguished from each other). If this is not exactly what Fiction means, it is what Justice should be. Samuel Johnson, abhorring the unjust fate of the true Cordelia at the end of *King Lear*, observes that 'since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded that the observation of justice makes a play worse'.

This 'English' morality (which is of course not limited to the English) is the apotheosis of a long developed anti-worldly ethos that bluntly refuses to acknowledge the gap between human experience and the independent operation of the world, the world as a realm distinct from and indifferent to the human subject, which realm Nietzsche rethinks as the eternal

recurrence. There is a certain small-mindedness, characteristic of the humanist subject at his most petty, to the notion that the world was made to *fit* man and that it is merely a question of bringing man into harmony with a given worldly order.

Hamlet is certainly a play that expresses faith in a divine causal order. 'There is a divinity that shapes our ends/ Rough-hew them how we will' (V.ii.10), and 'There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow . . . the readiness is all' (V.ii.219–222). Divine order will take care of everything. Or, as Charlemont says at the end of *The Atheist's Tragedy* (Tournear, 1611): 'Patience is the honest man's revenge'. As real as divine order may have been for Shakespeare – and even Nietzsche was no simple atheist – it often expects of us to submit to something distant and indifferent to us.

It appears, however, that man cannot bear the distance of the gods for very long. Even the robust, playful Greeks found it harder and harder to live in a beautiful but bewildering and ultimately unjust world. Eventually, even they began to *demand* justice, and hence the Socratic dialectic was born. From the eighteenth-century bowdlerization was the answer to Shakespeare's indifferent boyish divinities ('Like flies to wanton boys we are/ They swat us as they please'). This is why the world so desperately needs art and equally important, a proper *understanding* of art. At the conclusion of the introduction to *GS* Nietzsche writes:

Oh those Greeks! They knew how to live. What is required for that is to stop courageously at the surface, the fold, the skin, to adore appearance, to believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearance. Those Greeks were superficial – out of profundity! Are we not in this respect Greeks? Adorers of forms, of tones, and words? And for that very reason – artists? (*GS*, Preface 4)

Today, this theme appears as prominent element in deconstructive literature, constantly restating that words fail to make the world transparent. Shakespeare, the master of the stage, knew too that surface and appearance was everything:

The history of the rise of Greek tragedy now tells us with luminous precision how the tragic art of the Greeks was really born of the spirit of music. With this conception we believe we have done justice for the first time to the primitive and astonishing significance of the chorus. At the same time, however, we must admit that the meaning of tragic myth set forth above never became clear in transparent concepts to the Greek

poets, not to speak of the Greek philosophers: their heroes speak, as it were, more superficially than they act; the myth does not at all obtain adequate objectification in the spoken word. The structure of the scenes and the visual images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet himself can put into words and concepts: the same is also observable in Shakespeare, whose Hamlet, for instance, similarly, talks more superficially than he acts, so that the previously mentioned lesson of Hamlet is to be deduced, not from his words, but from a profound contemplation and survey of the whole. (BT 17)

To return to Shakespeare, is to catch a glimpse of a world in which it was possible to stage the self rather than to analyse it to death. The stage is where any notion of 'true' subjectivity is abandoned: it is the closest one can get to a world that is truly beyond good and evil. It is the only place where man is at ease with the indeterminacy at the heart of the self:

What is so difficult for people to grasp is their lack of knowledge about themselves. . . . Is this not precisely the dreadful truth: that what one can ever know of an action will never suffice to cross the bridge which leads from a cognition to the action? Moral actions are always something *other*.

On the stage, nothing less is expected:

On the morality of the stage. Whoever thinks that Shakespeare's theatre has a moral effect, and that the sight of Macbeth irresistibly repels one from the evils of ambition, is in error, and he is again in error if he thinks that Shakespeare himself felt as he feels. He who is really possessed of raging ambition, beholds this image with *joy*; and if the hero perishes by his passion, this precisely is the sharpest spice in the hot draught of his joy. Can the poet have felt otherwise? How royally, and not at all like a rogue, does his ambitious man pursue his course from the moment of his great crime! (D 240)

It may be argued that Nietzsche is resurrecting an *ethos* of the stage in his writing by undermining the author as source of authority over his text.

Connecting or ascribing a text to a certain 'author' may serve to underwrite the ways in which relations of power operate within given societies. In his chronicle of the changing meanings of the word 'author' through the ages, Foucault shows that until the seventeenth century, the scientific

text was legitimated by the celebrity and the signature of its author.⁴ Since then, scientific truth became formalized. Methodological procedures for verifying truth were developed, and the name of the author was no longer central to truth claims or the meaning of the text. Scientific truth became more 'public' and impersonal.

In literature almost the exact opposite took place.

During the Middle Ages, the texts we now call literary (stories, epics, comedies, tragedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of the author, their anonymity caused no difficulties, since their ancientness, whether real or imagined, was regarded as a sufficient guarantee of their status. (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 25)

The late eighteenth century saw the birth of Literature with a capital L. It was now an autonomous activity, highly valued, and occupied an important position on the intellectual stage. And the authority of the author kept growing. As is obvious, even in the age of the videosphere, the evaluation, standing and reputation of the author determines the position of the work. A text with an 'author' will receive far more attention than one that cannot be traced to a person whose credentials as an authority on a particular domain of 'truth' cannot be verified. The author is (for the time being) still alive and well. For Foucault, the practice of appending the author's name to a text means that a system of power is perpetuated wherein truth can be located, analysed, disseminated and 'owned' by certain individuals who are awarded the status of 'authorities'. The role of 'author' means that there continue to be individuals who have to bear the burden of truth, who, as 'authorities on true discourse' determine how their texts are to be received.

According to Foucault, the most important motive for dispensing with the author is that it is 'one of the possible specifications of the subject' (Foucault 1977: 138). Both the subject and the author are functions of relations of power, with others, and as indicated, also with ourselves. Disciplinary and confessional practices work to create subjects with static, unified, 'true' selves, a process in which writing plays an important part. The 'truth' of the individual is 'deciphered' by putting it into discourse, into mechanisms of confession, and the documentation of individuals through disciplinary practices like surveillance and examination. In addition, as we have seen, the construction of the self by power through the requirement of its putting its 'truth' in discourse is forgotten, as the ubiquity of this

practice makes it appear as natural and universal that a subject has to exist with an inner truth. Discipline binds us to our own individuality by documenting it and asserting it as the 'truth' of one's nature and character, while confession enjoins us to find our 'true' self deep inside and express it to others. Confession and discipline also function to create individuals who are *responsible* for their own actions, also a kind of autonomous power as to whether or not to act according to this truth. The subject created in this fashion is not simply the subject *with* an inner truth, but as Alcoff (1993: 114) states, a subject *in* truth, a truthful subject. This version of the self is not the universal, final product of nature, but as it becomes increasingly clear, a cultural construct invoking more and more resistance, due to its constraining tendencies. Foucault complains that the view of the subject as possessing an inner truth, having originated through practices of power 'forces the subject back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way' (Foucault 1983: 212). By insisting that the self has a truth to be discovered within, one that is truly one's own and must therefore be adhered to, one becomes caught within the constraints of a static truth. The choice as to whether to adhere to this truth may exist for the modern autonomous subject, but the status of this 'truth' as truth brings about a pressure to conform to it, both from outside and inside the subject.

There is no better way to subvert the power of the author/subject than by turning to the author whose identity is even more in dispute than Homer, namely Shakespeare. As we have seen in Chapter 1, even Nietzsche joined the still ongoing debate as to the 'true' identity of the author of Shakespeare's plays. As Nietzsche reminds us in *D*, Preface 3, Nietzsche complains that, in the face of authority, one is not allowed to think, 'one simply has to *obey!*' Reading the texts of an author who is as much of a ghost as his characters are, allows one to escape this authority. Nietzsche's own texts are prosopographic, with an entire cast of characters 'doing the talking' for him, from Alcibades to Zarathustra. That is not counting his own creations, like 'the last man', the free spirit, the old saint, the 'good European' – all which appear in an agonistic relationship on the Nietzschean stage. Nietzsche might well have said 'My name is Legion'. For Jacques Derrida, Nietzsche serves not only as an exemplar of undecidability, but as an example of an author who, divided against himself, sets the text free. In an unprecedented affirmation of the activity of interpretation, Nietzsche expressed an antipathy against anything, including the author, that could act as inhibitor of the play of the text. 'When his book opens its mouth, the author must shut his' (*D* 140). Once a text has been written, it acquires a life of its own, and becomes a playing field, or, perhaps in more appropriate Nietzschean

terms, a battlefield of contesting meanings. Throughout his oeuvre, but especially in *EH*, Nietzsche openly questions the privileged position of the author within the field of interpretation. In the opening sentence of ‘*Why I Write Such Good Books*’ he explicitly states: ‘I am one thing, my writings another.’ Nietzsche thus invites his readers to join in the game of interpretation, to bring their own perspectives into the task of evaluation. Nietzsche thus abandons his position of author-ity in favour of one that would provoke a healthy, *agonistic*, performative attitude by his readers.

Of particular significance is the fact that Shakespeare donned a *double* mask. Not only are his texts open to agonistic interpretation, even his characters are aware of this fact. A. D. Nuttall makes an interesting observation with respect to the ambiguity that is so characteristic of Shakespeare’s most Freudian play. He says that ‘*Hamlet* is the equivalent in literary art of a Rorschach blot – that is, expressly framed for maximum ambiguity so that when onlookers think they are interpreting, they are only revealing their own nature’ (Nuttall 2007: 201). He then points out that there is something resembling a *literal* Rorschach ink blot incident in a conversation between Hamlet and Polonius, where Hamlet can steer Polonius into agreeing with almost anything he says:

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that is almost in the shape of a camel?

Polonius: By th’ mass and ‘tis like a camel indeed.

Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius: It is back’d like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale.

Polonius: Very like a whale. (III.ii.376–382)

Nietzsche is certainly not advocating anything this passive, and there is no need to remind the reader what he thought of revenge. It is, however, one of history’s great ironies that when the Christian myth was truly alive, it was as robust and immoral – and therefore creative – as the ancients themselves were. As is demonstrated in Chapter 7, Christianity was never in danger of being practiced until the nineteenth century. This is because the nineteenth century, unlike its predecessor, became the age of sincerity. The nineteenth century appears to Nietzsche as Caligula, following Tiberius, did to Rome: all the flaws of its predecessor and none of its virtues.

All this (excessive romanticism of the nineteenth century) is eighteenth century. On the other hand, what has *not* been inherited from

it: insouciance, cheerfulness, elegance, brightness of spirit. The tempo of the spirit has changed; the enjoyment of colour, harmony, mass, reality, etc. Sensuality in matters of spirit. (WP63)

In a truly remarkable – yet seldom remarked upon – section from the second part of *HAH*, Nietzsche praises the eighteenth-century English writer Laurence Sterne. It is the only paragraph in which we find a reference to Sterne. It is a very ‘untypical’ comment for Nietzsche to make, and Sterne is not a writer whom one would expect among the many references to Goethe, Wagner and Schiller. And yet, there he is, under the heading *The most free writer*:

What may be praised in him is not the closed, the transparent, but the infinite melody, as if with these words, a style of art is named, in which the determinate form is continually broken, displaced, translated back into the indeterminate, so that it signifies the one and at the same time the other. Sterne is the great master of ambiguity. ... He elevates himself as masterly exception, above that which all literary artists demand of themselves: discipline, closure, character, constancy of intention, comprehensibility, simplicity, composure of moment and expression. (*HAH* II, 113)

Sterne was significant for Nietzsche because he was such a theatrical writer. That is, he did not succumb to the lure of realism – why, the narrator is born halfway through the book! – and there is no attempt made to show the ‘real’ Tom to the world. Like in a Shakespearean play, or a Greek tragedy, we are presented only with a series of masks, and it is impossible to be more Greek than that. As indicated by the single word for ‘face’ and ‘mask’ in ancient Greek – *prosopon* (the word ‘literally’ translates to ‘outer appearance’), the Greeks made no formal distinction between the mask and the ‘real’ person beneath it. The mask was not a ‘false’ face, but ‘being-masked’ the condition for existence in the public sphere. Or, as Hollis (1985: 215) puts it: ‘To be Greek was to be masked’. Since the Greeks lacked a category of ‘self’, the mask had ontological priority – there was no self that ‘sat for the portrait’. When Antigone, for example, uses the first-person singular, it is radically different from our own post-Romantic usage: ‘her usage of the first person singular may exceed the mere grammatical sense of the word “I”, and she may have a quasi-concept of self, but she definitely lacks a category of self’ (Hollis 1985: 218). Whoever attempts to go beneath the surface of the mask does so at his peril. As Poe depicted it in *The Masque of Red Death*, whoever attempts to rip off the mask, finds under it – nothing.

Notes

- ^{1.} Voltaire's name for Shakespeare.
- ^{2.} Everything passes, everything perishes, everything palls.
- ^{3.} From Voltaire's *Candide* (London: Penguin, 1963).
- ^{4.} Those texts that we now call scientific – those dealing with cosmology and the heavens, medicine and illness, natural science and geography – during the Middle Ages were accepted as 'true' only when marked with the name of their author.

Chapter 10

The Great American Who Loved the World

Just as fashionable as it is to deride the United States today for its supposed abuse of power, so popular it was in the early twentieth century to sneer at American 'barbarism'. According to Georges Clemenceau, 'America is the only nation in history which miraculously has gone directly from barbarism to decadence without the usual interval of civilization' (1929: 138).

Clemenceau, however, forgot about Emerson.

Unlike the other authors in this volume, Emerson merited much more than the occasional aside; he was a key influence on Nietzsche and a lifelong companion. From 1862 to 1888 Nietzsche was a devoted reader of Emerson, both for enlightenment and for pleasure. The relationship between the two authors therefore merits a lengthy study. That demand has been met,¹ and we shall therefore consider here only a few significant themes that Nietzsche appears to have taken up from Emerson. For Nietzsche, Emerson was one of the few philosophers who was actually comfortable in his skin and at ease with the world. Maurice Gonnaud wrote indeed that 'Emerson has made peace with the world and its rules. *English Traits* and *The Conduct of Life* have the serenity of an Indian summer' (Gonnaud 1987: 387). In many ways, Emerson was the opposite of Karl Marx: for him, the point of philosophy was not to change the world, but to teach man to live in it. Both Nietzsche and Emerson rejected their conventional religious upbringing – Nietzsche of course more fiercely than the gentler Emerson – for something more positive and robust. Emerson sought to shake off the 'Iceland of negations' that he found in the puritanical-moralistic atmosphere of his times. Like Nietzsche, he sought an affirmative ethics, an ethics according to which man would *want* to live.

Nietzsche, the lover of paradox and irony, probably appreciated the fact that it took a transcendentalist to bring man – or at least America – back to earth. Stanley Cavell has argued convincingly that Emerson (and Henry Thoreau) have inaugurated a new direction of philosophical inquiry that is noticeably concerned with the *near*, 'the common, the low, the familiar,

which is to say, among other things, of the here, in our poverty, rather in the there, in their pomp of emperors' (Cavell 1989: 108). While it was definitely not the 'democratic' Emerson that attracted Nietzsche – his career is an attack, if not exactly democracy,² on everything that is plebeian – but a younger, fresher voice that sounded inspiration from a new world. As we have seen, European Romanticism needed revising, and continental thought could do with a shift from system-building to a new respect for the power of self-cultivation. Contemporary readings of Nietzsche, influenced by post-structuralism, tend to emphasize themes like the death of the subject and the Derridean *Übermensch* as generous gift-giver. Readings like these, however, tend to emphasize the *moral* Nietzsche at the expense of the defender of quality, which is after all, what makes Nietzsche so unique in the history of philosophy. More than 60 years after the Second World War, we can afford to return – albeit carefully – to the *grander* Nietzsche.

The Emersonian Nietzsche is Nietzsche at his most individualistic. Emerson was an unabashed defender of the genuine individual, something entirely different from mere numerical distinction as a single unit of *homo sapiens*. Both Nietzsche and Emerson believed individualism to be rare and hard won, a fact grossly unappreciated in the modern West. Nietzsche wanted to give modern man – or at least some modern men – permission to be refined again, and Emerson was his only contemporary ally. What has been said of Emerson, namely that he loved man, but was not particularly fond of men, can also be said of Nietzsche, who like the truly great souled, found the world unprepared for the gifts he wished to bestow upon it.

It is significant that both Nietzsche and Emerson saw the state and a state-driven politics as a threat to culture. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hobbes's Leviathan came of age. It is likely that Nietzsche derived his notorious antagonism towards the political from Emerson. In 'Politics', Emerson argues that the state is not aboriginal, that is, it does not precede the individual. Indeed, every institution was once the product of a single strong individual, and every custom the product of successful legislation. As he often did when musing on perplexing questions, Emerson looked to Nature, and naturally, found nothing resembling democracy: 'Nature', he explained, 'is not democratic' (Emerson 1980: 310–311). Nietzsche could not agree more. He says explicitly that 'it is not Manu that separates from one another the predominantly spiritual type, the predominantly muscular and temperamental type and the third type distinguished neither in the one nor in the other, the mediocre type' (A 57). If one had to love Nature, it had to be for reasons beyond democracy.

For Emerson, there was no threat greater than an obsession with democracy at all costs. The cost incurred is usually the silencing of the true individual. What is hailed as the victory of the collective will is actually comprised of 'an ignorant and deceivable majority' (Emerson 1980: 311). A mass society primarily consists of conformists, opportunists, the weak, the gullible, the deluded and the ignorant (Emerson 1980: 311). And that is not counting those running for office. They are, Emerson adds, practitioners of 'the art of cunning, deception, disguising and obscuring the actual agenda'. In Emerson's opinion, 'every State is corrupt'. Consequently, he famously held, 'the less government we have, the better' (Emerson 1980: 23).

The threat however, did not end there. There is a conformity far worse than the enforced conformity by a totalitarian state for political ends, and that is the voluntary conformity of a people who no longer aspire to great ideals. Emerson openly feared a world whose values were determined solely by the 'sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude' (Emerson 1981: 35, 'The American Scholar'). In such times, belief in an 'intrinsic nobleness' was needed, a belief, if only imagined, in 'a circle of godlike men and women between whom subsists a lofty intelligence' (Emerson 1980: 115). For Emerson, it was 'natural' to believe in great men. The purpose of culture itself was 'the uplifting of men' (Emerson 1980: 116). This did not happen by reducing everyone to the lowest common denominator; if George Eliot set out to find universal values, Emerson tried to demonstrate that none existed. This does not mean, however, that there is no such thing as values. Nietzsche once wrote about Lou Salomé that she had told him that she had no morality, and for precisely that reason, her morality was the harshest of them all – an artist's morality. Emerson, too was eager to dispel the notion that he was a mere anarchist. Writing in 'Self-Reliance' he says: 'The populace thinks that your rejection of popular standards is a rejection of all standards and mere antinomianism'. In fact, it is quite the opposite. There is a greatness and nobility in the authentic hero that raises him above the rest of humanity. The perfected human takes the best of what humanity has ever offered and makes it his own. In the motto for 'History' he writes that the best are an expression of 'Caesar's hand and Plato's brain/Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain'. However, truly admirable and valuable qualities got lost in modernity's obsession with equality and democracy. Unfortunately, as Emerson reminds us, 'the heroic cannot be the common, nor the common the heroic' (Emerson 1980: 146–147, 'Heroism'). It should come as no surprise that Nietzsche

heartily endorsed this sentiment:

Every elevation of the type 'man' has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society and so it will always be – a society believing in a long scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings, and requiring slavery in some form or other. Without the *pathos of distance*, such as grows out of the incarnated difference of classes, out of the constant out-looking and down-looking of the ruling caste on subordinates and instruments, and out of their equally constant practice of obeying and commanding, of keeping down and keeping at a distance – that other more mysterious pathos could never have arisen, the longing for an ever new widening of distance within the soul itself, the formation of ever higher, rarer, further, more extended, more comprehensive states, in short, just the elevation of the type 'man', the continued 'self-surmounting of man', to use a moral formula in a supermoral sense. To be sure, one must not resign oneself to any humanitarian illusions about the history of the origin of an aristocratic society (that is to say, of the preliminary condition for the elevation of the type 'man'): the truth is hard. Let us acknowledge without prejudice how every higher civilization hitherto has *originated!* Men with a still natural nature, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, men of prey, still in possession of unbroken strength of will and desire for power, threw themselves upon weaker, more moral, more peaceful races (perhaps trading or cattle-rearing communities), or upon old mellow civilizations in which the final vital force was flickering out in brilliant fireworks of wit and depravity. At the commencement, the noble caste was always the barbarian caste: their superiority did not consist first of all, not in their physical, but in their psychical power – they were more *complete* men (which at every point also implies the same as 'more complete beasts'). (BGE 257)

The higher men of the future are more than just rulers. Once in power, most fools can govern, and most fools do. It takes someone truly different though, to be what Nietzsche calls an 'exemplar', and Emerson 'representative men'. The function of an exemplar is to awaken a higher self in those who are open to it. '[F]or your true nature lies, not hidden deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you normally take to be yourself. Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you what the real raw material of your being is, something quite uneducable, yet in any case accessible only with difficulty, bound, paralysed:

your educators can be only your liberators (*SE* I). The exemplar or liberator thus plays a role very similar to Socratic midwifery: a confrontation with the inspirational Other draws forth the best in the self. The higher self can only manifest itself through a confrontation with that which is admired and trusted in others. The confrontation calls forth what is still *other*, or at least lying latent in the present self. Ironically, you cannot ‘become who you are’ without an engagement with the world beyond self – the true antidote to asceticism. Nietzsche delivers a plea for an ethos of self-mastery above self-mutilation. The reason for the debilitating disease of European decadence can be found in the unfortunate choice of Europeans to retain and adhere to the worst part of Christianity – its morality – and to reject its best part, namely its mythological dimension. This is because of an insistence upon seeing morality as a transcendental given, as something to be ‘discovered’ instead of recognizing it as a product of human creation and interpretation, just like any other aspect of human culture. Returning to an idea that by now should be familiar to the reader, Nietzsche writes, ‘There are altogether no moral facts. . . . Morality is merely the interpretation of certain phenomena – more precisely, a misinterpretation’ (*TI* VII, 1). He also writes:

There is a time with all passions when they are merely fatalities, when they drag their victim down with the weight of their folly – and a later, much later time when they are wedded with the spirit, when they ‘spiritualize’ themselves. Formerly, one made war on passion itself on account of the folly inherent in it: one conspired for its extermination – all the old moral monsters are agreed that ‘*il faut tuer les passions*’. [...] To exterminate the passions and desires merely in order to do away with their folly and unpleasant consequences, this itself seems to us merely another acute form of folly. We no longer admire dentists who *extract* teeth to stop them from hurting.

On the other hand, it is only fair to admit that on the soil out which Christianity grew, the concept ‘*spiritualization* of passion’ could not possibly be conceived. For the first church, as is well known, fought *against* the ‘intelligent’ in favour of the ‘poor in spirit’: how could one expect from it an intelligent war against passion? The Church combats the passions with excision in every sense of the word: its practice, its ‘cure’ is *castratism*. It never asks: ‘How can one spiritualize, deify a desire?’ – it has at all times laid the emphasis of its discipline on extirpation (of sensuality, of pride, of the lust to rule, of avarice, of vengefulness). – But to attack the passions at their roots mean to attack life at its roots: the practice of the Church is hostile to life. (*TI*, ‘Morality as Anti-Nature’)

Emerson's 'Nature' was one of the first essays of his friend across the Atlantic that Nietzsche read, and strangely, the metaphysical idealism so obvious in this essay is never rejected anywhere. Nietzsche treated Emerson considerably better than he did Wagner, but it is to be borne in mind that it is easier to maintain friendships on paper than in the flesh. At first sight, Emerson appears to be just as decadent as any other: he conceives of Nature as a beautiful order that operates along with a deeper spiritual reality to emancipate man.

However, what sets Emerson apart is his refusal to see Nature as an order separate from that of man. The rare and gifted individuals capable of heroism and grandeur participate in the workings of Nature. For Emerson, a profound Nature awakens in us by its actions, by its very look and manners, the same power and beauty that 'a gallery of sculptures or pictures addresses' (Emerson 1981: 123, 'History').

Nietzsche probably appreciated the fact that he was openly anthropomorphic in his thinking, eschewing any coy attempts to get behind the 'true' nature of things. Art is not something Other to Nature, as we find, for example, in a writer like Oscar Wilde, but Nature herself exhibits the flaws and foibles of an artist. 'What is a man but Nature's finer successes in self-explication?' Whereas the realists treated Art like Nature, Emerson treated Nature in terms of Art. The two are not even always clearly to be distinguished: 'Art is the need to create. . . . Nothing less than the creation of man and nature is its end' (Emerson 1980: 215). The predominant characteristic of nature is her creativity, and she always aims at growth and development, yet without having a clear, final goal in mind. Regrettably, she is also dreadfully slow. Emerson counsels his readers to bear in mind that 'the slowness of nature hardens the ruby in a million years' (Emerson 1980: 116–117). Nietzsche himself showed signs of impatience: right through Book IV of *WP* he yearns to take short cuts to the men of the future through breeding. It should be clear, after Chapter 5, that he does not refer to anything remotely like what we today know as eugenics; that would imply a kind of scientific asceticism. Given Nature's notorious slowness, however, we may forgive Nietzsche if even he succumbed to the lure of cheating a little. Far more important however, is his desire for the cultivation of a new, inspiring *type*, and as we have made clear in the introduction, a type is a qualitative abstraction, not a biological blueprint. Nietzsche is arguing for a re-evaluation of evaluative standards. How we measure greatness has to shift to standards beyond mere good and evil.

To be truly 'beyond good and evil' is not a matter of simply dismissing the qualities that this system holds to be valuable, but to relate them to

each other in a radically new way. In both his ethics and his metaphysics, Nietzsche rejects crude dichotomies. In order to secure and value qualities that are regarded as good and noble it is necessary to acknowledge the immoral and evil as well. Not only are they necessary, but are in fact deeply intertwined – it is folly to suppose them to be of two distinct classes. Instead, Nietzsche writes, ‘between good and evil actions there is no difference in species, but at most of degree. Good actions are sublimated evil ones, evil ones are vulgarized and stupefied ones’ (*HAH I*, 107). An important strategy in overturning the dichotomy of good and evil is what Solomon and Higgins identify as the ‘shocking tribute’ (Solomon and Higgins 2000: 63). This is when Nietzsche admires qualities in individuals history has deemed to be monsters, like Caesare Borgia or the Emperor Tiberius. Even Emerson proved to be more than the Yankee Kahlil Gibran. It is highly likely that Nietzsche had encountered *The Conduct of Life* when he began to undertake his revaluation of values.

The barbarians who broke up the Roman Empire did not arrive a day too soon. Schiller says that the Thirty Years’ War made Germany a nation. Rough selfish despots serve men immensely, as Henry VIII in the contest with the Pope; as the infatuations no less than the wisdom of Cromwell, as the ferocity of the Russian czars; as the fanaticism of the French regicides of 1789. Wars, fires, plagues break up unbearable routine, clear the ground of rotten races and dens of distemper, and open up a fair field to new men. [. . .] Nature is upheld by antagonism. Passions, resistances, dangers are educators. We acquire the strength we have overcome. (Emerson 1983: 1083)

Nietzsche seeks to overcome the narrow economy of moral subjectivity by reinserting the old banished elements in a wider economy beyond good and evil. This includes a renewed appreciation for traditionally neglected or devalued aspects of life such as contingency, empirical limitations, temporality and situatedness. That is, he seeks to usher in a period of convalescence from the decadent desire to *exorcize*. Nietzsche would be the first to admit, or rather, to emphasize, that the slaves are as necessary as the masters are. They are not merely tolerated as a necessary evil but should be seen as a vital element in the process of forging meaning. ‘Even neediness is needed!’ (*GS 17*).³ The hierarchy of master and slave may have had its origins in a struggle for recognition as Hegel holds; however, for Nietzsche, this battle is not to terminate in a final perfect state, but to continue as the ongoing battle for *differentiation*. And the greater the differentiation,

the *Pathos der Distanz*, and the more complex the hierarchies involved, the stronger, the more potent and the more just will a society be. Emerson agreed. In public culture as well as one's private life, 'everything is worked up and comes into use – passion, war, revolt, bankruptcy, folly . . . blunders, insult, *ennui*' (Emerson 1903–1904: VI, 262).

That is why Nietzsche thinks the nature of the saint has been misunderstood. The saint represents a paradox: the conversion of one set of qualities into its exact opposite. But there would be no contradiction if we were to recognize that these qualities are related to one another. 'It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related, tied to and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things – maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe! (*BGE* 2). In other words, Nietzsche advises against a mindless selection of the pretty aspects of life, but encourages a deliberate engagement even with the harsh and the ugly, to give genuine style to one's world. The distinction between discipline and exorcism is useful here. The metaphysician denies and exorcise, the artist shapes and styles.

Using the model of Stoic self-discipline, Nietzsche celebrates a self who accepts, as Epictetus does, the circumstances in which it finds itself, not passively, but robustly, as an exercise of the sovereign power that is reserved for it alone, and that no other can take away. This self is a bent bow, a self bending over in a titanic effort at self-command. He writes in *D* 114 that it is precisely through suffering that even the weak for once get the opportunity to legislate. Pain can be a tremendous stimulus: even when given the opportunity to avoid it, there will be those who deliberately seek it out, purely in order to demonstrate that they can endure it. They may even end up wishing that they did not have the monstrous pride that put them in the position of pain. Being in pain is experienced as an offence against the mind that lives within the body. It forces an exclusive focus upon the body, and the intellect, that Nietzsche refers to in the passage, does its utmost best to regain proper dominion. As a result, the entire organism undergoes a transformation and invigoration. It is the pain itself separating the sufferer from the world around him that gives the sufferer the opportunity to see the world in a new light, without the 'lying little charms' that usually surround it. The suffering man has the opportunity to tell himself:

'for once be your own accuser and executioner, for once take your suffering as the punishment inflicted by yourself upon yourself. Enjoy your superiority as judge; more, enjoy your wilful pleasure, your tyrannical arbitrariness! Raise yourself above your unfathomable depths!' Our

pride towers up as never before: it discovers an incomparable stimulus in opposing such a tyrant as pain is, and in answer to all the insinuations it makes to us that we should bear witness against life in becoming precisely the *advocate of life* in the face of this tyrant. In this condition one defends oneself desperately against all pessimism that it may not appear to be a consequence of our condition and humiliate us in defeat. The stimulus to justness of judgment has likewise never been greater than it is now, for now it represents a triumph over ourselves, over a condition which, of all conditions, would make the unjustness of judgment excusable - but we do not want to be excused, it is precisely now that we want to show that 'we can be without need of excuse'. We experience downright convulsions of arrogance. - And then there comes the first glimmering of relief, of convalescence - and almost the first effect is that we fend off the dominance of this arrogance: we call ourselves vain and foolish to have felt it - as though we had experienced something out of the ordinary! We humiliate our almighty pride, which has enabled us to endure our pain, without gratitude, and vehemently desire an antidote to it: we want to become estrange from ourselves and depersonalised, after pain has for too long and too forcibly made us *personal*. 'Away, away with this pride!' we cry, 'it was only one more sickness and convulsion!' (D 114, KSA 3.106)

The experience of pain, rather than to turn him against life, has actually given the sufferer the opportunity to enjoy the most *human* of pleasures known to man, that of judging and evaluating. This makes life even more desirable. Although the passage under discussion does not refer to *Übermenschlichkeit*, and can even be seen to depict the suffering of weak individuals, it can certainly be argued that pain, correctly understood, has a unique ability to bring out *strength*. The self attains its highest distinction precisely in circumstances that would seem to be urging towards its complete degradation, seizing the opportunity for re-creating the self that only such circumstances can offer. Important for our purpose, *Übermenschlichkeit* shows itself not only in a willingness to accept pain and injustice as a necessary part of the order of things, but even to seek it out as providing an opportunity to enhance strength. In Emersonian terms: one cannot hope to be a representative individual if one's experience is not representative of what life has to offer.

First on the list of negatives is Buddhism. Although there are certain superficial similarities, the *Übermensch* does not aim for an ultimate state of harmony as the ideal of a just man. If anything, the just man is an agon on

a small scale. Such an individual will deliberately seek out sources for strife: the ugly, the painful, the tragic, as possible material to be sublimated and incorporated into a great life:

One question remains: art also makes apparent much that is ugly, hard, and questionable in life; does it not thereby spoil life for us? And indeed there have been philosophers who attributed this sense to it: 'liberation from the will' was what Schopenhauer taught as the overall end of art; and with admiration he found the great utility of tragedy in its 'evoking resignation'. But this, as I have already suggested, is the pessimist's perspective and 'evil eye'. We must appeal to the artists themselves. What does the tragic artist communicate of himself? Is it not precisely the state without fear in the face of the fearful and questionable that he is showing? This state itself is a great desideratum, whoever knows it, honors it with the greatest honors. He communicates it – must communicate it, provided he is an artist, a genius of communication. Courage and freedom of feeling before a powerful enemy, before a sublime calamity, before a problem that arouses dread – this triumphant state is what the tragic artist chooses, what he glorifies. Before tragedy, what is warlike in our soul celebrates its Saturnalia; whoever is used to suffering, whoever seeks out suffering, the heroic man praises his own being through tragedy – to him alone the tragedian presents this drink of sweetest cruelty. (*TI*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', KSA 6.128)

The same could not, however, be said of the Christian ascetic. As Nietzsche explains throughout the *GM*, when man's protestations against the cruelty of the world fell upon deaf ears, man turned against himself, and actually began to thirst for pain in the rather perverse manner of the modern subject, creating for himself concepts like sin, guilt, and divine punishment.

Nietzsche's philosopher-artists 'of the future' should clearly be aware of this interconnectedness between good and evil. For they are to be

in a mode of thought that prescribes laws for the future, that for the sake of the future is harsh and tyrannical toward itself and all the things of the present; a 'reckless, "immoral" mode of thought, which wants to develop both the good and the bad qualities in human beings to their fullest extent, because it feels it has the strength to put both in their right place – in the place where each needs the other' (*WP* 464)

The reward of fruitfulness is a Whitmanian one – ‘to be rich in oppositions’ (*TI V, I*). This means to reject the urge to try and exorcise one’s weaknesses like a pathetic slave frightened of himself. Instead, it is to incorporate these very weaknesses into the composition of the self and – as was noted before – ‘to make a melody out them’. In the case of every exemplar a weakness is artfully combined with a strength and this artistic judgement accounts for the greatness of the individual. It is the same for life. Like the true artist that he was, Nietzsche draws his ideals from art and not life. More than a hundred of his 150 or so ‘models’ that occur throughout his work are artists. In advancing the point that in the greatest human beings we find a controlled war under way, his example is none other than the immortal Bard of Stratford. Or rather, keeping in tune with the death of the author – no need to raise spectres – his *texts*. He describes Julius Caesar the character as ‘the most beautiful type’ (*WP* 966), He has ‘inexorable and fearful instincts that provoke the maximum of authority and discipline among themselves’ (*TI IX, 39*). This inner chaos can, of course, easily manifest itself in criminal behaviour, which is why Nietzsche writes that ‘in almost all crimes some qualities also find their expression that should not be lacking in a human being’ (*WP* 740). This also helps to explain why the child (or even animal!) figures as an image for the type that is not overcome by the complexity of life and the burden of ceaseless change without any marked improvement in the human condition. In the third *UM* Nietzsche writes:

Let me think. Where does the animal cease, where does man start? That man, the only one nature cares about! As long as someone desires life as he desires happiness, he hasn’t raised his glance beyond the horizon of the animal; he only wants with more consciousness what the animal seeks in blind impulse. But we all do this for the most part of our lives. Ordinarily, we do not get beyond animality; we ourselves are the animals that suffer meaninglessly.

But there are moments *when we understand this*. The clouds scatter and we see how we, together with all of nature, press on toward man as something that stands high above us. Shuddering, we look into that sudden brightness and backwards; the refined beasts of prey are running there and we with them. The monstrous restlessness of men on the great desert of the earth, their building of cities and states, their waging of wars, their collecting and dispersing, their running all over the place, learning from one another, their mutual trickery and stepping on one another, their screams of need, their howl of pleasure in victory – all of this is a

continuation of animality, as if men should purposely be retarded and betrayed by his metaphysical propensity.

The moment we understand ourselves as this being, is the moment when we need the remedy of the child and his ability to be at ease with the pain of existence. In ZI, 'Of the Three Metamorphoses' the child is the sublimated outcome of two previous types of men, represented by the *camel* – the load bearing spirit that cannot go on forever – the *lion*, a creature that says *No* to the perpetual flux (Nietzsche uses the word 'becoming') and the duty to create that it entails. The child is innocent, the ultimate symbol of the creator-artist. 'The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a play, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a holy yes-saying' (ZI).

It can with safety be said that Nietzsche is today as untimely as he had ever been – if anything, the strategies of recovery from and compensation for the Second World War have pushed Western man in the completely opposite direction to what Nietzsche intended. Global popular culture has moved from mere good and evil to an ethic of schmaltz and sentimentalism. In our age, culture is threatened more by vulgarization by the masses who claim to practice it than by a central authoritarian institution that could suppress it. The year 1984 came and went; the triumph of the market-place saw to it that there is more choice available to Western man than ever before in history. As we have mentioned before though, for Nietzsche – and Emerson – freedom is more than the passive freedom to have fun in a neat private zone. To be truly affirmative requires an uplifting set of virtues, not just a list of do's and don'ts. Virtue is of course notoriously difficult to define; one already lacks the virtues of sound judgement and practical wisdom if one slavishly (or Königsbergian) sticks to a list. Given his fondness for paradox and self-contradiction, Nietzsche clearly drew inspiration from the Emersonian sentiment that 'A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds' (Emerson 1980: 'Self-Reliance').

Emerson is rightly honoured today for his role in the abolitionist movement. However, it is unlikely that he would have been overjoyed at the fact that this is today the most widely celebrated dimension of his career. A truly Emersonian response may well have been that a nation who regard his role in the abolition of slavery as his greatest contribution to human freedom are truly united – as slaves. Emerson conceived of freedom in richer terms than the merely negative, and Nietzsche was to be inspired by him to conceive of justice as much more than mere equality. For Nietzsche as well as Emerson, there is an injustice that is far greater than any injustice towards the weak, and that is injustice towards the strong. This occurs when justice

is conceived in such terms that *men* become *the masses*. When this happens, all other ideals are sacrificed:

If Culture really rested upon the will of a people, if here inexorable powers did not rule, powers which are law and barrier to the individual, then the contempt for Culture, the glorification of a 'poorness in spirit', the iconoclastic annihilation of artistic claims would be more than an insurrection of the suppressed masses against dronelike individuals; it would be the cry of compassion tearing down the walls of Culture; the desire for justice, for the equalization of suffering, would swamp all other ideas. (*The Greek State*)

The result, of course, is nihilism. Nihilism is in Nietzsche strongly associated with measurelessness, the result of the attempt

to think of an eye which cannot be thought at all, an eye turned in no direction at all, an eye where the active and interpretative powers are to be suppressed, absent, but through which seeing still becomes a seeing-something, so it is an absurdity and a non-concept of the mind that is demanded. (*GM* III, 12)

The advent of nihilism necessitates the question as to in what form will the continued existence of man be justified. His answer, as Daniel Conway (1997: 6) points out, is not in Whiggish reforms or liberal ideals, but through the cultivation of those beings who represent man at his best. Again risking a great injustice to a complex thinker, it is possible to say that Nietzsche's most important theme is that man's existence is justified only by those exemplary individuals who redefine the value of life and the limits of human achievement on an aesthetic basis. Another way of putting it is to say that existence is rendered *worthy* only through sheer achievement, the joyful staging of diverse human talent for the ennoblement of life. An early text articulates this in terms still rather shocking to those wedded to equality:

We ought really to have no difficulty in seeing that, when a type has arrived at its limits, and is about to go over into another type, the goal of its evolution lies not in the mass of its exemplars and their well-being, let alone in those exemplars who happen to have come last in point of time, but rather in those apparently scattered and chance existences which favourable conditions have here and there produced. For the

question is this: how can your life, your individual life, receive the highest value, the deepest significance? How can it be least squandered? Certainly only by living for the advantage of the rarest and the most valuable exemplars, and not for the advantage of the majority, that is to say, those who, taken individually, are the least valuable individuals. (UM III, SE 6)

It is of course this Nietzsche that the majority of his interpreters were for a long time at pains to avoid. Opinions like these are usually dismissed as a 'youthful indiscretion', as if speaking about that unfortunate marijuana incident in the past of a politician one supports. But although Nietzsche shifted his stance towards many issues, styles and disciplines in his all-too short career, he never changed his core values. In a much later text he states that

The problem I thus pose is not what shall succeed mankind in the sequence of living beings (man is an *end*), but what type of man shall be bred, shall be *willed*, for being higher in value, worthier of life, more certain of a future. Even in the past this higher type has appeared often – but as a fortunate accident, as an exception, never as something willed. (A 5)

This is a very Emersonian paragraph. Although the gentle Bostonian refrained from such dangerous words like 'breeding' and 'willing', and such categorical statements like 'man is an end', he is clearly concerned with the fact that the 'well turned-out' are becoming increasingly rare.

Surprising for such a brazen elitist though, Nietzsche not only holds that everyone has a higher self, but that everyone has occasions when this higher self shines through:

Everyone has his good days when he discovers his higher self; and true humanity demands that *everyone* be evaluated only in the light of this condition and not merely in the light of his workaday unfreedom and servitude. (HAHI, 624)

Nietzsche might have saved his interpreters a great deal of trouble if he had chosen to define his epitome of quality as a characteristic, *Übermenschlichkeit*, and not a definitive noun, *the Übermensch*. This implies that the *Übermensch* is something solid and definite, to be discovered like a lost treasure if only the right method is followed. This is definitely not the case; we are told very little about the *Übermensch*. Whereas Nietzsche gives

us detailed descriptions about the last men, the higher men, the free spirit and the slave, we have to content ourselves with very little with respect to the enigmatic *Übermensch*. At best we can say, following Alan D. Schrift, that the *Übermensch* is 'the name given to an idealized conglomeration of forces that Nietzsche refers to as an 'achievement' (*EH* III, I). Schrift then suggests that we construe 'becoming-*Übermensch* with a hyphen as a compound verb marking a compound assemblage' (Schrift 1995: 73). By doing this, we can focus on the becoming-*Übermensch* as *process*, without reifying or hypostatizing the endpoint as *telos*. As we have seen in the quote from *Human All Too-Human* above, *Übermenschlichkeit* is not a permanent state or condition, and it is not limited to a particular class, race or nation. Instead, it refers to the process of accumulating, discharging and displaying strength, and that comes in a great many guises. Becoming-*Übermensch* may be described as a process of 'life-enhancement', and is characterized by self-overcoming and transformation of the will to power rather than by an ideal form of subjectivity.

It is important to emphasize that the exemplar only serves as inspiration. To admire courage in others, for example, should motivate one to develop it in oneself. The complexity of any virtue, and the embeddedness of all individuals in particular historical situations, ensure that qualities that one cultivates, develop a life of its own. History may repeat itself, but time is not a Xerox machine. In this way, Alexander, even if imitating Achilles counted among his goals in life, soon made his own history. As we have seen in the case of Thomas Carlyle, Nietzsche does not uphold a Kantian model of the genius who acts as a model for imitation. This is a rather plastic model of genius, and easily leads to the monumental view of history. A monumental view of history makes the happening of any further events impossible, and brings us back to Cassius' complaint about Caesar. One can be so great that one obscures the life-giving light for others. In the end, it also leads to stagnation and stasis of even the greatest spirit. The great individual is never to be copied *in toto*. Great ideas are sometimes easier to express in poetry, and a contemporary of Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, captured the spirit of the exemplar well in his *Psalm of Life*:

Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
 And departing, leave behind us
 Footprints on the sands of time
 Let us then, be up and doing,
 With a heart for any fate;

Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait.

Zarathustra did not want disciples, and neither did Emerson. As we have seen in Chapter 6, Nietzsche tried to move beyond an ethic of reciprocal exchange.

Section 142 of *GS* comes directly from Emerson's Essays:

Frankincense – Buddha says: 'Do not flatter your benefactor!' Repeat this saying in a Christian church: right away it clears the air of everything Christian. (*GS* 142)

The original passage comes from Emerson's *Gifts*, and it reads: 'It is a great happiness to get off without injury and heartburning from one who has had the ill luck to be served by you. It is a very onerous business, this of being served, and the debtor naturally wants to give you a slap. A golden text for these gentlemen is that which I so admire in the Buddhist, who never thanks, and who says, "Do not flatter your benefactors." This does not, however, imply an ascetic withdrawal from the world into a private comfort zone, like that of the old saint that Zarathustra encounters on his way down from the mountains. As Emerson would also emphasize, self-reliance does not imply asceticism. Rousseau's solitary walker, for example, is just that: *solitary*, not higher.

In Schopenhauer as Educator, Nietzsche writes:

It is hard to create in anyone this condition of intrepid self-knowledge because it is impossible to teach love; for it is love alone that can bestow upon the soul, not only a clear, discriminating and self-contemptuous view of itself, but also the desire to look beyond oneself and to seek with all one's might for a higher self as yet still concealed from it. (*UM* III, 'Schopenhauer as Educator')

Discipleship would imply some idealized form of subjectivity, and this would violate one of the central Nietzschean tenets, namely his repeated rejection of the subject. Emerson and Nietzsche's respective conceptions of subjectivity have proven to be so complex that it is even today hard to reach consensus as to how to define them.

Zarathustra, however, was quite comfortable with his parasites. Parasites live off great men; they do not follow him. They enjoy the shade of a Colossus; they are not even interested in imitating him. For an age that has turned

equality into a proper fetish, this is sacrilege. For Nietzsche, however, this is not a problem: his faith in the richness and diversity of life assures him that there is room for every type in the world. Even if some types are superior, they too depend on the others if only for shaping their identity against them.

This remains a constant endeavour. Time and again, Nietzsche assures us that the self is not self-identical, but plural. If we adhere to the classic definition of the individual, coming from the medieval Latin *individualis*, originally from Latin *individuus*, which means ‘not divisible’, ultimately referring to *dividere* ‘to divide’, then no one is an individual. We are all *dividua*, divided in ourselves. And this is good news: it means that there is always a higher self for which one may reach. ‘And what do we know of ourselves, when all’s said and done? And what the spirit which leads us on would like to be called (it is a question of names)? And how many spirits we harbour?’ (*BGE* 227). Emerson, too, was aware of this lack of self-identity, but expressed it in Transcendentalist terms. Finding himself divided between the role of Conservative and Reformer, he writes:

The worst feature of our biography, is that it is a sort of double consciousness, that the two lives of the Understanding and of the Soul we lead, really show very little relation to each other; they never meet and criticize each other, but one prevails now, all buzz and din, and the other prevails then, all infinitude and paradise, and with the progress of life the two discover no greater disposition to reconcile themselves (Emerson 1960: 8, 10–11).

It is not surprising then, that we struggle to understand ourselves. And if we cannot understand ourselves, it can hardly be expected that others will. At least never completely. According to Emerson, it is best that we make peace with this aspect of the human condition.

Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus and Galileo and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood. (Emerson 1980: 167, ‘Self-Reliance’)

Nietzsche probably paid Emerson the greatest compliment he ever paid anyone. In *Twilight of the Idols* we read:

Emerson. – Much more enlightened, more roving, more manifold, subtler than Carlyle; above all, happier. One who instinctively nourishes himself only on ambrosia, leaving behind what is indigestible in things.

Compared with Carlyle, a man of taste. Carlyle, who loved him very much, nevertheless said of him: 'He does not give us enough to chew on' – which may be true, but is no reflection on Emerson. Emerson has that gracious and clever cheerfulness which discourages all seriousness; he simply does not know how old he is already and how young he is still going to be; he could say of himself, quoting Lope de Vega, 'Yo me sucedo a mi mismo' [I am my own heir]. His spirit always finds reasons for being satisfied and even grateful; and at times he touches on the cheerful transcendence of the worthy gentleman who returned from an amorous rendezvous, *tamquam re bene gesta* [as if he had accomplished his mission]. 'Ut desint vires,' he said gratefully, 'tamen est laudanda voluptas' [Though the power is lacking, the lust is nevertheless praiseworthy]. (*TI*, 'Skirmishes of an Untimely Man', 14)

Emerson led a light-footed existence. Like Cleopatra, age could not wither him, nor custom stale an infinite variety. The reason for this is simple: he refused to give us 'too much to chew on'. To give ready definitions would go against everything for which he stood. For Emerson, Man is a kind of in-between figure: neither completely in control of the world, but not completely subject to his circumstances either.

Instead of trying to go against the 'scientific' spirit, Nietzsche goes over and above it by allowing tragedy to 'swallow' its rather simplistic and mechanistic framework. This is obvious from the way Nietzsche resurrects the ancient notion of 'fate' as a richer alternative to the rather mechanistic 'chance'. Aristotle, in an attempt to supplement his famous analysis of the four 'causes', proceeds by defining chance as an accidental cause in the sphere of those actions that are done for some purpose. Accordingly, spontaneity is the wider term whose scope includes animals and the lower inanimate world incapable of deliberate intention. His example is the rather prosaic one of a stone falling and hitting a man. Because the stone is incapable of deliberate intent, this incident is said to have happened spontaneously, and not by chance. Chance, on the other hand, is defined as something closer to coincidence: a man is going to the market to meet a friend, and by chance running into another man who owes him money. The latter has the money with him and pays his creditor. The fact that the man was on his way to do something else when he encountered his debtor is called chance.

For Nietzsche, fate is not a providential distribution of meaning and justice, it is simply what befalls us. It is clear once more, that Nietzsche had read Emerson. The Massachusetts sage was thoroughly aware of the

struggle between freedom and fate, the ‘marvellous balance between beauty and disgust, magnificence and rats’ (Emerson 1960: 961, ‘Fate’). The theme of that essay is to explore ‘the endless, intricate, overlapped, interweaved way’ in which our notions of fate and freedom knit together in ‘one web of relation’ (Emerson 1960: 961, ‘Fate’). Even earlier, already in ‘Nature’, he writes that ‘Nature’s dice are always loaded. . . . In her heaps and rubbish are concealed sure and useful results’ (Emerson 1980: 27). This does not mean, however, that one is simply to acquiesce to what Fate may bring. Quite the contrary: she more often than not issues a challenge. Beauty itself, Emerson writes in *The Conduct of Life*, ‘rests on necessity’. If there is a central theme to Emerson’s work, it is his faith in human will and creativity. ‘“[D]isasters of all kinds, sickness, offence, poverty”, he writes in “Compensations” prove to be benefactors’ (Emerson 1960: 297). ‘So use all that is called Fortune’ Emerson urges his readers in ‘Self-Reliance’.

The aim of the life truly worth living, Nietzsche says, is to become like those masters of musical improvisation who are able to breathe a beautiful meaning even into an accident (GS 293). Even though Nietzsche’s notion of self-creation does not ultimately satisfy the criteria to meet the Autonomy Condition, as among others, Brian Leiter holds (Leiter 2001: 315), it is possible to argue that for Nietzsche, we are saved from living out our lives according to simple trajectories by the sheer complexity of the world. In order to master our fate, however, we need knowledge:

To that end (of creating ourselves) we must learn to be the best learners and discoverers of everything that is necessary and lawful in the world: we must become *physicists* in order to become *creators* in this sense. Hitherto all ideals have been based on the ignorance of physics. . . . Thus: long live physics! (GS 334)

Or as Emerson put it, ‘The material of freedom consists of necessities’ (Emerson 1990: 80). Interestingly, in *HAH* II, 363, man is depicted as mastering fate – a very old theme in Western literature. However, *mastering* fate is not the same as ridding oneself of it altogether. What makes *HAH* II, 363 unique is that man is depicted as the ground for the seed corn, fate. The ‘larger’ image is used for man, while the ‘smaller’ image represents fate in a reversal of literary custom. It is the quality of the soil that determines whether anything will grow.

Nietzsche’s conception of chance is far more *tragic* than even that of Aristotle. If we turn to the etymology of the word ‘chance’, we see that it is derived from the Middle English *cheaunce*, which in its turn hails from the

Old French *cheance*. This word in its turn is derived from the Latin *cadentia*, which translates as ‘falling’. ‘Chance’ is described as ‘the happening of events’, the way things have *fallen* out’ and ‘fortune’ (my emphasis). This means, as Joan Stambaugh (1999: 95) points out, that chance does not simply refer to that which cannot be anticipated or calculated, but also implies opportunity, as the final meaning in the list, that is, *fortune*, confirms. The Latin root of fortune, *fors*, also refers to chance, and what makes it important for our purposes is its proximity to fate and necessity. Normally, one tends to think of chance as the antithesis of fate and necessity: the unplanned and the unexpected that occurs for no reason at all. Importantly for our purpose, however, is the fact that both the ancient notion of fate and the modern notion of chance refer to a framework that is beyond the control of the subject. For Nietzsche, chance is closer to Cusanus’ notion of chance as coincidence, but still something less than rigid, iron-clad destiny. Nor is chance simple random arbitrariness. There is a necessary element in chance – human situatedness limits the contingencies of the world. This is why the self cannot just become *anything*; it is determined by the particular power-*quanta* that make up the self in question. It is simply up to the latter to see that it reaches its fullest potential:

Learning transforms us, it does that which all nourishment does which does not merely ‘preserve’: as the physiologist knows. But at the bottom of us, ‘right down deep’, there is, to be sure, something unteachable, a granite stratum of spiritual fate, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined selected questions. In the case of every cardinal problem there speaks an unchangeable ‘this is I’; about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only learn fully – only discover all that is ‘firm and settled’ within him on this subject. (*BGE* 231, *KSA* 5.172)

This unreachable, sublime element, however, does not entail that Nietzsche embraces a straightforward fatalism. Indeed, he warns explicitly against the ‘Turkish Fatalism’ so succinctly captured by the Arab sigh of resignation, commonly uttered when disaster strikes: ‘*Mektoub* – it is written’. This is an *impotent* form of fatalism; a pure fatalism that leaves no room for heroic action. This is a unique form of injustice in its own right. If hubris is the Western refusal to submit to the greater order of things and allow for the free play of the will to power, the Mohammedan version is *inhumane*. It aims to submit to the laws of the cosmos to such an extent that it leaves no room for a *human* domain of freedom. The most famous expression of this idea occurs in *The Wanderer and His Shadow* 61 (*KSA* 2.580), where Nietzsche

opposes his conception of fate with the more deterministic 'Turkish' form of it, which sees human existence and fate as two irreconcilable forces.

In reality every man is a piece of fate; when he thinks to resist fate in the way suggested, it is precisely how fate fulfills itself, the struggle is imaginary, but so is the proposed resignation to fate, all these imaginings are enclosed within fate. You yourself, poor fearful man, are the implacable *moira* enthroned even above the gods that govern all that happens; you are the blessing or the curse or the fetters in which the strongest lies captive; in you the whole future of man lies predetermined: it is no use for you to shudder when you look upon yourself.

It is like trying to escape from the weather.

Yet the fatalist actively resents fate.⁴ He has not yet learned to join in when the iron hands of necessity shake the dice-box of chance (*M* 81). The genuine lover of fate, on the other hand, makes sure that everything he meets on his way is in some way or other incorporated in a life of celebration. Pain and misfortune are tools to be honed against the stone of fortune. In this, love of fate is not that different from love of another person: it is not a mere resignation to a situation, but an active engagement in the realization of potential.

Rather than to understand fate as an absolute Other that imposes itself upon an individual life, as depicted in primitive tragedy, fate is understood as the limit to the extent that one can act as lawgiver upon oneself and one's circumstances. As Nietzsche puts it, *fatum* acts as 'ein fließendes Machtgrenzen-bestimmen' – a moving limit to power (Aphorism 10542, *NL* 1884–1885, *KSA* 11.638). One's fate is therefore intimately bound up with who one is, and emerges from one's situation. This means that fate is a radically *open* limit. Man, as soon as he acts, determines his own fate, even if this fate should form part of the anonymous workings of the Moirae. What matters is that man *experiences* this open-ended limit as freedom.

We have seen in preceding chapters that for Nietzsche, the inspirational men of the future achieves just the right balance between remembering and forgetting. One of Emerson's most important themes is the cultural impotence when a people sick with their own history. If the Old World wonders how there can be a literature without legend and history, Emerson wonders how there can be any fresh ideas if one is so buried under history's clutter. Nature herself appears to have emigrated from the Old World to the New: 'There, in that great sloven continent, in high Allegheny pastures, in the seawide sky-skirted prairie, still sleeps and murmurs and hides the Great Mother, long since driven away from the trim hedge-rows and

over-cultivated garden of England' (Emerson 1903–1904: V, 288). This is a very Nietzschean idea: as we have seen in Chapter 9, freedom from civilization is as important as forgetting itself is to the formation of consciousness. One of the central, and often missed points in the Nietzschean *oeuvre* is the need for limits and borders, so that artists and creators can *focus*. Emerson therefore reminds his readers that, as schooled as they are to be in the rich plethora of goods and ideas culture has to offer, they should also cultivate a healthy sense of scepticism, and the ability to sift, judge and reject the superfluous. As Robert Louis Stevenson also believed, a well-spent life is better than a merely well-read one. One should not become so cultivated that one loses touch with uncultivated reality.

The man of this age must be matriculated in the university of the sciences and tendencies flowing from all past periods. He should be taught all skepticisms and unbeliefs, and made the destroyer of all card houses and paper walls, and the sifter of all opinions, by being put face to face from his infancy with Reality. (Emerson 1904: VI, 64–65)

This brings us to the purpose of the *Übermensch* that is at once the hardest to understand and the most difficult to swallow. Never in the history of philosophy has any philosopher created such a thoroughly *unphilosophical* concept: a figure whose task it is to stop men from *thinking too much*. Such men are dangerous; they soon resolve the paradoxes upon which every society is built, and blind men with the light of too bright a reason. An object lit to the same extent from every direction would not be visible. As the Old Masters knew so well, you need shadow to make the light truly visible. The answer to one of the most difficult questions that Nietzsche raised, namely, 'who is the *Übermensch*?' is simply whoever can form a compensatory bulwark against the seas of nihilism. This is why figures like Napoleon appear so prominently in the Nietzschean *oeuvre*. While Napoleon was certainly a military figure, he was not *only* a military figure, he was a myth. Such a reading immediately invites criticism that I, too, read Nietzsche in Romantic terms, positing a grand Subject as the cultivator of history. But if we take a leaf out of the Emersonian book again, such as a couplet from his *Ode, Inscribed to W. H. Channing*, which reads: 'Things are in the saddle/And ride mankind', and continue to remember the *tragic* Nietzsche, we are unlikely to go overboard into the excesses of Romanticism. Virgil would be a safer example: Aeneas did not only found a new city, but – at least according to Virgil – succeeded in obscuring the memories of the burning walls of the lost Troy to such an extent, that his followers could truly live again and embrace the

freedom offered by a new life in the Italian peninsula. Without such a life-giving shadow and the gift of forgetting, there is but nihilism and a sense of being overwhelmed by time stretching indefinitely into past, and equally endlessly into the future. It is for this reason that the Romans counted time *ab urbe condita* – from the founding of the city, a definite point of reference.

It is the most unjust condition of the world, narrow, thankless with respect to the past, blind to what has passed, deaf to warnings, a small living vortex in a dead sea of night and forgetting: nevertheless this condition – unhistorical, thoroughly anti-historical – is the birthing womb not only of an unjust deed but much more of every just deed. And no artist would achieve his picture, no field marshal his victory, and no people its freedom, without previously having desired and striven for them in that sort of unhistorical condition. As the active person, according to what Goethe said, is always without conscience, so he is also always without knowledge. He forgets most things in order to do one thing; he is unjust towards what lies behind him and knows only *one* right, the right of what is to come into being now. So every active person loves his deed infinitely more than it deserves to be loved, and the best deeds happen in such an excess of love that they would certainly have to be unworthy of this love, even if their worth were otherwise incalculably great. (UM II, i)

Legislation is, however not limited to ancient history. In his essay titled ‘What is an Author?’ Michel Foucault identifies one of the most underappreciated of the various author functions. One of the most meaningful roles a creative writer can play is to be a ‘founder of discursivity’.

Founders of discursivity are unique in that they are not just the authors of their own works. They have produced something else: the possibilities and rules for the formation of other texts. In this sense, they are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text. Freud is not just the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *Jokes And Their Relation to The Unconscious*, Marx is not just the author of *The Communist Manifesto* or *Das Kapital*: they both have established the endless possibility of discourse. (In Rabinow 1984: 114)

Founders of discursivity initiate a new form of discursive and textual practices, and if they are truly successful, a new way of being. Unlike the founder of a science (like Sassure), a founder of a new form of discursivity’s own discourse remains heterogeneous in terms of the further transformations of

the practices they have initiated. That is to say, subsequent manifestations of the initial discourse continue to return to the 'fountainhead', not in order to 'correct' it, but to continue to derive meaning from it. In this way, for example, writers as diverse as Kristeva, Lacan, Guattari and Irigaray continue to pay homage to Freud, even if they have long moved on from his basic tenets. In other words, Freud founded much more than psychoanalysis, the practice: he founded an entirely new world. Although Foucault explicitly distinguishes between the founders of disciplines and novelists, I think one can with safety say that James Joyce and even J. R. R. Tolkien, and today Umberto Eco, can be seen as writers who transformed the world of fiction to such an extent that entire genres followed in their wake.

These are examples of 'representative men' at their best.

Rather than to try and deny Nietzsche's urge for greatness, it should be seen as presenting a threat to genuine social justice. Nor should the mere existence of aesthetic hierarchy automatically be seen as a barrier to social justice. Nietzsche and Emerson espouse a justice far greater than mere egalitarianism, namely a justice of difference. This should not be seen in some sentimental Levinassian obsession with the Other, but as a courageous acknowledgement of the complexity and plurality of the world. To try and establish justice through liberal standards only, would for both Emerson and Nietzsche constitute the greatest injustice possible, namely the prevention of the fullest and richest operation of the Will to Power. It is not only in the Father's house that there are many mansions; earth is at least equal in this. The solution to worldly problems is not to reach for utopian solutions, but to develop as many worlds as is humanly possible.

As Oscar Wilde once put it, 'Still I believe that at the beginning god made a world for each separate man, and in that world which is within us, we should seek to live.'

Notes

- ¹. Stack, George J. (1992) *Nietzsche and Emerson: An Elective Affinity*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- ². Democracy, if it recognized healthy aesthetic goals, could of course stimulate a vibrant culture, as much of contemporary literature around the *agon* proves.
- ³. See also GS 56.
- ⁴. It would be interesting to compare Melville's Ahab in this context.

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Index

- abolitionist movement, Emerson 181
absurdity of existence 159
active and reactive forces 41–2
adaptation 101
 The Advancement of Learning
 (Bacon) 19, 21
aesthetic education 125–6
Afterworld 80
 agon 10, 12
altruism 131
American ‘barbarism’ 170
Anglo-Saxon philosophical
 tradition 2
antiquarian history 161
aphorisms 26
archaic societies 154
Arendt, Hannah 24, 51
Argument from Design, ‘proof’ of
 God 90
Aristotle
 on the four ‘causes’ 187
 Metaphysics and *Physics* 25
art
 as deception 144
 immediate knowledge and 145–6
 need to create 175
 science and 7
 tragedy and 179
 world’s need for 163
artist
 and child, similarity 144
 as source of truth 144
artistic dimension to intellectual
 construction 28
artist-legislator status of Francis
 Bacon 33
artists and truth-tellers 54
arts and sciences, development 19
asceticism 46–8, 179
 in Christianity 91, 121
Augustine, rationalism 55
author, authority of 165
Autonomy Condition 188

Bacon, Francis, philosopher 14, 16,
 17, 44
 Aphorisms 21, 22, 23
 artist refusing his vocation 26
 commonwealth 4
 Essays, text style 27
 Protestantism 17
bad conscience 45
‘bad faith’ in Locke 63
barbarian caste 173
‘barbaric’ age of Shakespeare,
 Nietzsche on 155
Baroque style 148–9
Being, presence of 5, 6
Bentham, Jeremy, social welfare 5
Berkeley, George, philosopher 84
Berlin, Isaiah 12
 Beyond Good and Evil (Nietzsche) 3, 35,
 106, 137
biological ‘truth’ 96
 The Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche) 7, 8
Blake, William 12
Blanchot, Maurice, *L’Entretien Infini* 26
Bloom, Alan 1
‘body’ of State 36
body thinking and
 mind thinking 30, 58, 60
Bourdeau, Jean 2
Buddhism 178
Byron, George Gordon, Lord 140–1, 149

- Carroll, Lewis 64
 Categorical Imperative 133
 causal necessity 76
 causality 75–7
 a fiction 78
 Nietzsche on 77, 79
 thesis on, David Hume 73
 cause and effect 75–6, 78
 certainty 6, 58
 chance 188–9
 chaos 155
 Christian ascetic 179
 Christian ethos, attack on 125
 Christian morality 100, 132–3, 174
 Nietzsche's objection 134–5
 Christianity 19, 80, 91
 19th century 167
 anti-tragic attitude 21
 destroyer 11
 ideology of 138
 morality and 137, 138
 scientific reason and 20
 class difference 173
 Classicism versus Romanticism 148
 Clemenceau, Georges, on America 170
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, and
 Hamlet 160
 Comte, August, *The System of Positive
 Polity* 130
 conflict 8, 10
 political 4
 and virtues 45
 conformity threat 172
 conviction 69
 costs and benefits 120
 creation, for human existence 30
 creation myth of Genesis 97
 creativity 7, 29
 creator, beneficent, dismissal by
 Hume 90
 Creator's glory 21
 cruel jokes 118
 cruelty
 ancient culture and 117
 festive pleasure 118
 higher culture 121
 suffering and 123
 culture
 contempt for 182
 threatened by vulgarization 181
 Darwin, Charles 45, 95, 102
 Darwinism
 Nietzsche's critique of 96
 reactive 97
 Dawkins, Richard 5, 44
 ethical naturalism 105
 death of God 30, 90–1, 132
 debtor-creditor relationship 119–20
 decadence, European 174
 Delacroix, F. V. E., paintings, Nietzsche
 on 146–7
 Deleuze, Gilles 100
 on will to power 41, 42
 democracy 1, 171–2
 Derrida, Jacques, on authorship of
 Nietzsche 166–7
 Descartes, René
 and human reason 56
 methodologist 17
 Rationalism 55
 destruction, desire for 8
 deus absconditus 128
 dialectical argument 51
 Dickens, Charles, Victorian
 sentiment 128
 differences in smells 57
 differentiation, battle for 176–7
 discourse, founders of 192–3
 Donne, John, poet 19
 double representation 85
 Duty, George Eliot on 132

 Eco, Umberto 193
 education, intellectual and moral 125
 egoism and altruism 98
 elephant, description of 83–4
 Eliades, Mircea 154
 Eliot, George (Mary Ann Evans) 1,
 128–39
 Middlemarch 129, 130
 universal values 182
 Victorian ideas 128
 elite, marginalization of, Hobbes 48

- embarrassment after Nietzsche 52
- Emerson, R. W.
 The Conduct of Life 170
 English Traits 170
 on man 187
 relationship with Nietzsche 70–1
- empirical knowledge, Bacon 23
- empirical-positivism 14
- empiricism 52, 53, 58–9
- enemy
 in Jewish world 10
 of 'open society' 1
- English
 morality 162
 need for Christianity, Nietzsche
 on 136–7
 overpopulation 102
 pessimism 43
 tradition 5
 type 4
 utilitarians 106
- Enlightenment 19, 20, 50, 154
 alienation of body 60
 philosophy 96
- equality 11, 44, 110, 115
- Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (Locke) 52
- eternal life 158
- Eternal Recurrence 104, 157, 158
- ethics, affirmative 170
- Evans, Mary Ann (George Eliot) 128
- evolution theory 96
- executions 118
- exemplars, valuable, of human
 talent 182–4
- existence of man,
 justification for 182
 struggle for 98
- experience of world
 ideas from 56
 and knowledge 55
- exploitation, life is 116
- expression of self 77
- falseness of judgment 52
- fate
 and freedom 188
- mastering of 188
 no escaping 190
- feeling, Romantic obsession with 146
- Feuerbach, Ludwig 129
 The Essence of Christianity 130
- folk medicine 89
- forgetfulness as repression 119
- Foucault, Michel
 on author's place 165–6
 on classical world 150
 on depth 25–6
 on power 111
- free market economy 1, 110
- free will 65
- freedom 110–11
 of opinion 112
 of speech 112
- Freud, Sigmund 2
- futurity, to be earned 117
- game playing 55
- genealogy 4, 9
- genius 9, 184
- geometry 36
- German idealism 73
- global popular culture 181
- God as projection of human needs 130
- God question, Nietzsche on 90
- Good
 and evil 5, 176
 and pleasure 106
- government corruption, Emerson 172
- grammar, belief in 67
- Grayling, A. C., *Towards the Light* 12
- Great Happiness Principle, Mill 116
- Great Redemption 157
- Greeks
 culture 10, 11
 feelings of power 126
 gods as equals 91
 Nietzsche on 163
 tragedy, and Greek chorus 163–4
- habit 77
- Hamlet
 ambiguity of 167
 divine causal order 163

- Hamlet (*continued*)
 doctrine of 159
 victim of history 159–60
- happiness
 desirability of 109
 search for 142
- Hartley, David, philosopher 45
- health and sickness 134
- heat and mechanical
 energy 61
- Hegel, G. W. F. 95
- Heidegger, Martin 104
- Heraclitus 8
- herd instinct 98
- hermeneutics 3
- hero, destruction of 158
- heroism 172–3
- hierarchical societies 118
- historical societies 154
- history, 190–1
 before birth 77
 progressiveness of 19
- Hobbes, Thomas 35–59
Leviathan 4, 5, 48
 will to power 40, 41
- Homer's Contest* 9
- honesty, Nietzsche's plea for 38
- 'Honour' in Elizabethan/Jacobean
 drama 152–3
- Hooker, Richard, *Laws of
 Ecclesiastical Polity* 66
- hubris 189
- humanists, Francis Bacon 23
- humans 3, 12, 59, 99, 134
 activity and causality 76
 capacity for metaphor 69
 creativity, Nietzsche on 143
 estranged 23
 existence, tragic condition 43
 illusions 57
 intercourse as mutual services 107
 thought limitations 130
 vulnerability and knowledge 21
 will, life-denying 47
- Hume, David 72–94
A Treatise of Human Nature 72, 74
 similarity to Nietzsche 72
- ideas and perception 55–6, 58, 60, 63
 complex and simple 56
 independent 73
- identity question 70, 84–7
- illusion and play 8
- image substitution 61
- imagination, power of 85
- immortality 9
 George Eliot on 132
- impressions
 simple and complex ideas 74, 75
- improvement of man's mind 21–2
- inaction 40–1
 as creation 28, 29
- individualism 107, 171
 Locke's philosophy 65
- inductive reasoning 17, 18
- infinity, abstract idea 62
- information from science 43
- inhibition of consciousness 119
- injustice 138
 towards the strong 181
- innatism 56
- intellect and dissimulation 54
- intellectual ideas, none in Locke 56
- interpretation
- Jefferson, Thomas, rights 65
- Johnson, Dr Samuel, on Bacon 23
- Joule, James Prescott 61
- Joyce, James 193
- Judeo-Christians
 God, rejection of 90
 slave interpretation of morality 122
 values 11
- Julius Caesar, Nietzsche on 180
- justice 113–14
 and injustice 157
 'natural' 115
 Nietzsche notion of 125
- justification of morality 131
- Kant, Immanuel 13
- Kaufman, Walter, rehabilitation of
 Nietzsche 1, 66
- Keats, John, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* 143
- knowing the world, collecting 40

- knowledge 29, 55, 82, 110
 - affective engagement with world and 32
 - life force, Plato 142
 - need for 188
 - power and 17, 111
 - utility of 39
- knowledge diminution in perspective 31, 32
- knowledge questioning of Romantic movement 141
- laissez-faire* economy 1, 148
- language 129
 - born from nothing 67
 - definition 68
 - human nature and 48–9
 - ideas and 56
 - prejudices and 51
- laughter
- laws of nature 18
- legislation as philosopher's function 33
- Lewes, George 130
- liberalism 1, 64, 112–13, 126
 - English 12
 - for Mill 122
- liberty of action 109
 - classic conception 12
 - positive and negative 12
- life-enhancement 184
- linguistic obscuration 52
- literature in 18th century 165
- Locke, John, liberal and metaphysician 50–71
 - Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 5
 - property 5
- logic 141
- logical positivism 8
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, on great men 184–5
- love and cruelty 118
- Lovett, William 9
- Machiavelli, Hamlet as 160
- Malthusianism of Darwin 98
- man
 - eternity and, link 156
 - as machine 35
 - as measure 47, 64
 - power loss at Fall 20
 - power over nature 20
- Manfred (Byron) 140
- Marx, Karl 2, 24
- 'mask' and 'face' in Greek tragedy 168
- materialism, not a metaphysical theory 356, 44, 110
- materialist, Hobbes 36
- mechanistic theory 37
- memory 60
- men and the masses 181
- mental agent 62
- metaphor
 - contingency and 71
 - in Nietzsche 38, 67–9
 - suppression 23
- metaphysics 2, 5, 6, 18, 82
 - absence of meaning 159
 - fundamental questions 63
- Mill, John Stuart 1, 5, 116–37
 - On Liberty* 112
 - On the Subjection of Women* 111
 - System of Logic* 18
- Mill on the Floss* (Eliot) 131
- mind
 - and perception 62
 - and senses 53–4
 - as *tabula rasa* 57
- modernism, nihilistic 44
- modernity 16, 24, 25
 - Nietzsche on 80
- monism 35, 40
- monkish virtues 91
- moral relativism 1
- moral subjectivity 176
- moralistic position 108
- morality 6, 7, 89, 125
 - Christian 133, 174
 - 'English' 25
 - Hobbes 46
 - of mores 120
 - Nietzsche's claim 134–5

- morality (*continued*)
 - stage 164
 - vulnerability and 108
- morality, knowledge, happiness 39
- More, Thomas 4
- motion, events as 35
- movability 41
- music
 - romantic, Nietzsche on 149
 - spirit of 159
- naisserie anglaise* 116
- natural history 18, 99
- natural rights 65, 109
- natural science, success 96
- natural selection theory 97–100
- naturalistic humanism,
 - (Feuerbach) 129
- Nature
 - conformity to law 44
 - deceptive woman 39–40
 - Emerson on 171, 175
 - Nietzsche on 104, 105
 - original state, Locke 65
 - valuable spouse 34
- negation 94, 170
- negation of truth 8
- negative instances, search for 18
- Nietzsche, F. W.
 - on artists 54–5
 - Book of the Philosopher* 54
 - classicist and Romantic 140, 141
 - on Darwinism 102
 - denunciation of British
 - philosophers 1
- Nietzschean cruelty 122–3
- nihilism 24, 72, 79–80, 182
 - active forms 93
 - aesthetic dimension 145
 - measurelessness 81
 - passive forms 93
 - refusal to live in world 44
- noble and common 124
- nothingness, will to 47
- Novum Organum* (Bacon) 19, 23
- number and measurement in
 - knowledge 37
- O'Neill, Eugene, on man's tragedy 13
- objective truth 24, 25, 29–31, 83
- observation of properties 57
- omniscience, death of 30
- The Origin of Species* (Darwin) 95, 99, 100
- pain 177–8
 - avoidance 122
 - freedom from 116
 - injustice of 108, 109
 - prerequisite for greatness 123
- pain other to 'real' 'normal'
 - existence 108
- Pascal, Blaise, self-denial 92
- passions 174
- pathos of distance 173, 177
- perceptions of objects 84
- permanence in nature, delusion 79
- perspective 31, 32, 83,
 - method and 28
 - prejudices and 32
- perspective of world, limits of 59
- pessimism of English philosophy 35
- philosopher
 - congenital defects 64
 - as evaluator 42
- philosophia prima* 18
- philosophical asceticism 46
- philosophy
 - history of 29
 - theologically inspired 51
 - theory of knowledge 39
- physics 18, 36, 50
 - and metaphysics 18
- physiology 50
- physis* and *nomos* 27
- pity, contempt for 131–2
- Plato, Platonism 80
 - Rationalism 55
 - and Socrates 11
- Platonic Christian nihilism 81
- pleasure 116
 - as greatest good 109
 - or pain 117, 118
- pleasure principle, Freud 119
- pluralism 126
- poetic imagery 141

- polytheism 91
- Popper, Karl, falsification 18
- positivism 17
- post-structuralism 171
- power over nature 17
- power, will to, Hobbes 41
- prejudices
 - and tastes in ideas 79
 - teleological 77
- priest, low valuation on life 47
- primal relationship with world 69
- Property in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*
 - (Nietzsche) 6
- property, longing for 6
- pseudo-sciences 89
- qualities and quantities 37
- quality versus mediocrity 125
- racial classifications 3
- rational order beneath chaos 25
- rationalism 23, 43, 95
 - abstract 111
 - delusions 55
 - morality 128
- reaction to external stimuli 32–3
- reactive force 42
- ‘real’ world, or noumenon 85
- realism 129, 130
 - in art 128
- Romanticism and 137
- reality depiction in poetry 150
- reality, Nietzsche 28
- reason 1, 20, 82
- reasoning, inductive 76
- reciprocity 118
 - as vulgar 114–15
- redemption of world 158
- Reé, Paul 4
- Reformation 7
- relativism 129, 130
- relief for human condition 21
- repression of human nature 47
- resemblance 87
- resentment* 4, 7, 35, 45–6 122
- revenge in Christian morality 92
- rhetoric 54
 - dismissal of 66
 - Locke on 51
 - rhetorical thinking 50
 - right to liberty 113
 - right to security 113
 - rights, basic 113
 - ritualization 161
- Romanticism 141
 - England 145
 - European 171
 - excess 147
 - Nietzsche on 146, 148
- Rome or Judea 6–7
- Rosenberg, Alexander, on ideas 74
- Russell, Bertrand 129
 - on Byron 140, 141
- Sartre, Jean Paul, nausea 159
- scepticism 72–94, 129, 191
- Schumann, Robert 157
- Schwegler, Albert 73
- science
 - man’s need for 43
 - for understanding God 39
- scientific materialism 96
- scientific truth 7, 128, 165
- scientific work and lack of vanity 20
- self
 - higher 183
 - plural 186
- self-assertion 128
- self-deception, Kant on 131
- self-defeating Christianity 138
- ‘self-made’ man 157
- self-mastery 174
- self-torture 121
- sensations 56
- sense experience 22
- sense perception, evaluative 58
- sense stimuli from world 74
- senses, limits of 59
- sentimentalism and schmalz 181
- service of mankind 21
- Shakespeare, William 13, 15, 152–69
 - authorship in dispute 166
 - Colossus figure 161
 - influence on Nietzsche 153

- Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 'Defence of Poetry' 144
- sickness and death, Romantic
 obsession with 149
- Simonides, life as a game 49
- slave morality 44, 65
- slaves and masters 10
- 'smell of a Rose' 57
- Smith, Adam, economics 97
- Smith, Rev. Sydney 3
- Social Contract 70
 H. G. Wells on 66
- social justice 193
- social progress 1
- socialist revolution 108
- Socrates 8
- solipsism 131
- soteriological ideal (salvation) 5, 23,
 108, 109
- soul, of man 88–9
 invention of 120
- species history 95
- spectatorship 24
- Spencer, Herbert, Nietzsche on 99
- Spinoza, Baruch, dogma of 102
- state as opium of the masses 47
- Sterne, Laurence 152–69
 as master of ambiguity 168
- Stoic self-discipline 177
- Strauss, David, 'mythbuster' 9, 137
 Nietzsche's attack 45
- strength from pain 178
- strong state, no guarantor of
 peace 48
- struggle
 for existence 101, 102, 104
 for pleasure 118
- subjectivity 146, 185
 fundamental 69–70
- substance, existence of 63
- substrata 53, 63
- suffering 122
 as crucible 13
 discipline of 155
 of man 108
- Superman 13
- symbolism of Ophelia's fate 159
- sympathy 131
- synecdoche, part for whole 62, 68, 116
- texts in Middle Ages 165
- thinkers, levels of 26
- Thoreau, Henry 170
- Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Nietzsche) 1
- Tolkien, J. R. R. 193
- tragedy 158
 dramatic 154
 opposite of poetic justice 162
 on stage 13
 vulnerability and 156
- tragic and human
 consciousness 156
- Troilus and Cressida*, Ulysses on
 order of things 153–4
- truth 16, 33
 avoidance 142–3
 creation of absolute 69
 discovery not creation 6
 evaluative 23–4, 25
 falsehood and 82
 inner 166
 need for defence of 82, 84
 protection of 112
 revealed from works 21
 striving after 92–3
 unmasking of 128
 as woman 34
- Truth and Beauty,
 Romanticism 143
- 'Turkish Fatalism', 'it is written' 189
- Twilight of the Idols* 1, 106
 on Emerson 186
- types, racially determined 3
- Übermensch* 137, 183–4, 191, 192
 and Renaissance man 36
- United States, abuse of power 170
- The Use and Abuse of History for Life*
 (Nietzsche) 7
- utilitarianism 33, 82, 108–9, 116,
 126, 143
 attack on 123–4
 principles of John Stuart Mill 106
 vocabulary of Darwin 103

- utility as principle of 'good' 109
- utopian element in Bacon 21
- utopianism 4, 158
- valuation on life, low 47
- value domains 46
- verification of truth 111
- vices of modernity 2
- Victorian England and its Empire 97
- Victorian ideas, Eliot
 - representative of 128
- virtues and conflict 45
- vital energy, suppressor of 48
- vocabulary of the stage 156
- Voltaire, Dr Pangloss 158
- Wagner, Richard 9
- war of all against all 45, 97, 98
- warriors, Greek 10
- weak prevailing over strong 101
- Western paradigm of
 - knowledge 38
- wheel of Being 157
- Wilde, Oscar, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 137
- will to happiness 142
- will to power 71, 102–4, 114, 121, 156, 193
- will to self-preservation 41
- will to truth 141–2
- Wordsworth, William 144
- world beyond this 80
- Zeus, world-child 8

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